

Indian Horizons

Volume 62 No. 4
October-December 2015

Indian Council for Cultural Relations

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was founded on 9th April 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first Education Minister of independent India.

The objectives of the Council are to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes relating to India's external cultural relations; to foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries; to promote cultural exchanges with other countries and people; to establish and develop relations with national and international organizations in the field of culture; and to take such measures as may be required to further these objectives.

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Editor
Subhra Mazumdar

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A chance conversation with archaeologist Dr B R Mani of the Archaeological Society of India had set the ball rolling. Dr Mani had narrated the eventful discovery of Chinese pottery belonging to the royal kitchens of Emperor Firoz Shah Tuglugh that had been unearthed. One also learnt that reference to this exotic kitchenware had found a mention in the writings of the ancient traveler Ibn Batuta. Thereafter, I learnt from other scholars how chronicle and travel writing had been associated with almost every era of Indian history and thus an issue dedicated to such classics from the pens of famed travelers, merited attention in the form of an exclusive issue.

Beginning our saga of travelogues is Dr Shonalika Kaul's account of the *Rajatarangini* by the ancient Kashmiri poet and Sanskrit scholar Kalhan. More than straightforward accounts, Dr Kaul points out the volume 'adapted local motifs, locales and content to a trans-local poetics and stood in as the pre-eminent register of Kashmiri regional self-expression'. Reading further into her account, we realize that the *Rajatarangini* is also regarded as the first formal account of history on the subcontinent. Going beyond statehood, historicity and accounts of royal diktat, the work also contains vivid descriptions of the scenic land, making it a lyrical, historical and political treasure par excellence

The name of Abul Fazl and his chronology of the days of Emperor Akbar is as familiar to us as

cricket. But reading Dr Meena Bhargava's essay on it, gave me insights not just into the regal reign but also into the man behind the account. Abul Fazl one learns, went through a spate of inner conflict before accepting the responsibility, as he came from ascetic stock and a courtier's life was at cross purposes with his scholarly pursuits. Also, the fact that there were innumerable drafts of the chronology before it took final shape was news to my ears. That the effort was well worth it becomes clear when through the course of this article one learns the many facets of the volume, its sub divisions and its stylized arrangements of facts and circumstance.

Another chronicle of a royal persona that has gripped popular imagination is the *Harshacharita* by Banabhatta. Dr Kanika Kishore has made a detailed and exacting examination of the highlights of this treatise and the interesting manner in which the details give an insight into the realm. What this article further emphasizes is the relationship that the chronicler enjoys with his ruler-patron, gauged at best as a massive ego clash between the twain. The immediacy of the contents is not far to seek as the volume talks about the entire clan as though they were still around.

Since chronicle writing saw continuity during the medieval period of Mughal rule, Dr Najaf Haider has offered to us a comprehensive assessment of the chronicles from the time of Babur and its unbroken continuity by successive rulers.

This comparative study gave me the pleasure of examining the personalities of the royals who had commissioned these writings, and how each of them merited attention not only for the contents but also for ancillary information, such as the first chronicle written by a Mughal princess Gulbadan, the economic advantages of upholding manuscript writing and illustration, to mention a few.

Our regular Photo Essay is dedicated to specimens of the fine porcelain excavated in Delhi. Their freshness and delicacy of artistry, almost belies their antiquity and the fact that it is the largest collection excavated from a single site, worldwide, makes it even more significant. The signature behind the plate, detailing its documentation as it being part of the royal kitchen 'anoints' facts with the romance of fiction.

The essay on Sunderland's chronicle from the British era, made me sit up and take stock literally. That there were dissident voices from non-Indian groups advocating India's demand, becomes clear through this chronology, penned by the American Unitarian minister, a veteran of

the American Civil War. His sympathy for India's just cause gives the account forthrightness.

Concluding our pick of chronicles, is an account written by the famed scholar and traveler from Uzbekistan, popularly known as Al-Baruni. Dr Vinay Kumar has painstakingly pieced together the many references made in it. The observation made of the people and the countryside alongside philosophical comments, gives the volume a plebian familiarity and endears itself to us readers through its plainspeak.

In a slight departure we have chosen to present the international symposium on the Ruhi-Sufi traditions of Kashmir and its relevant context. Other conferences of cultural interest in this coverage include the conference on Indology held at Moscow, the conference on the Bhagvad Gita held at Nehru Centre, London, and the International Conference of Indologists held at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi. The archival snapshots from the eighties and earlier decades as our opening pages is thus well balanced against the recent spate of conferences held globally.

Editor



Subhra Mazumdar

Foreword

Amb. C. Rajasekhar
Director General, Indian Council for Cultural Relations

The current volume examines the rich tradition of chronicle writing available in India. These have been penned across the length and breadth of the country giving insights into the life and times in which they were penned. As these works are written by indigenous scholars and numerous travelers to India, their descriptive contents encompass not just the splendours of various royal courts but also the life in the bazaar, the shrine, and the homes of the ordinary. Handpicking a few of these records that have survived, for a look at their significance today, has been the core endeavour behind this issue.

The chroniclers, we have presented in the volume are not coded in a historical perspective. What merited their inclusion is the valuable inputs that their works contain and their continued recognition in the public gaze. Many of them are the stuff of school texts while others have merited acclaim because of their intellectual, historical and literary merit. Above all, they are mirrors held up to the culture of their respective eras and thus become potent ambassadorial reportage on matters pertaining to the politico-cultural climate of their times.

The chronologies touched upon have also attracted serious research into their subject matter. However, their interest among the

general readership is no less diminished and right from a school boy's marvel at the quaintness of the accounts to the observations that strike the serious scholar, these works have never moved out of the popular radar in India. Also, this volume, is a first-ever attempt made by the ICCR to examine this aspect of our culture through the essays penned in this issue.

Besides the bulk of essays on the issue's chosen subject of interest, the volume includes a photo essay of specimens of Chinese porcelain, which finds a mention in the writings of Ibn Batuta, when he had visited the court of Firoz Shah Tuglaq. Scholars today acknowledge that it is the largest single collection of such chinaware anywhere in the world, adding further significance to the findings.

In our attempt to keep a link with the past at ICCR, we continue to include a cache of photographs on the varied cultural events hosted by the Council within its premises, at the Azad Bhavan. This archival cache is counterbalanced with a designated section on the many conferences that the ICCR has been hosting worldwide, currently. Through this arrangement the volume brings to view an effective platform to juxtaposition the many sided content of Indian culture that is being nurtured through the efforts of the ICCR.



Amb. C. Rajasekhar

From our Archives



Lecture by Prof. G.E.G. Catlin (U.K.), January 23, 1963



Exhibition of Paintings by M.A.J. Bauer (Netherlands), December 20-18, 1963



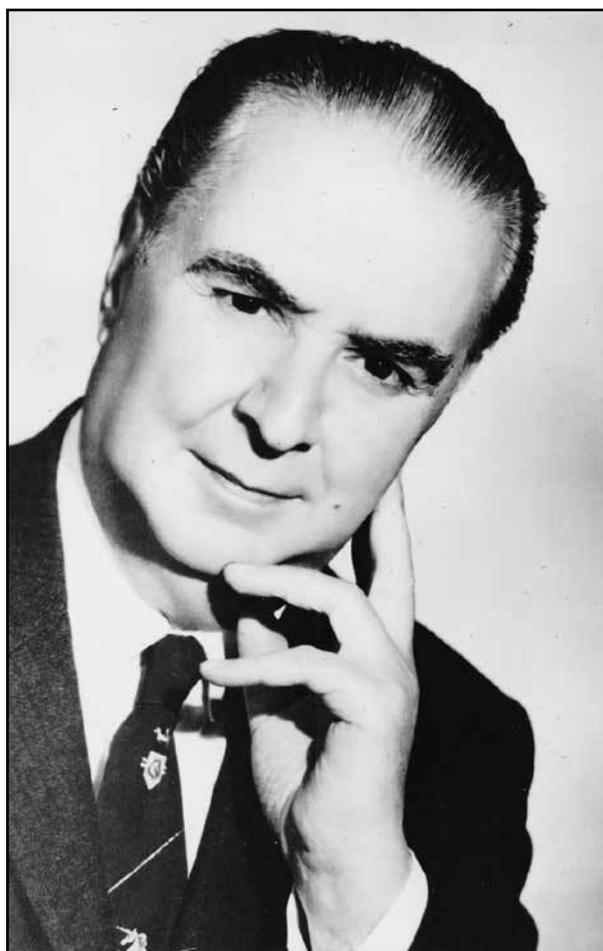
Visit of Miss Margaret Kenyatta (Kenya), December 1963 – January 1964.



Visit of Miss Margaret Kenyatta (Kenya), December 1963 – January 1964.



Visit of Soviet Muslim Leaders (April, 1964)



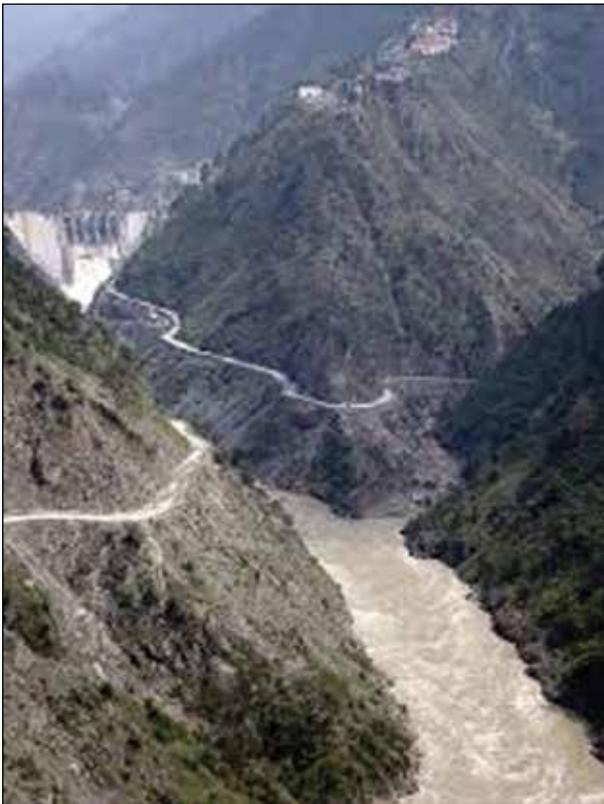
Music Recital by Mr. & Mrs. C. Movelli (Mexico), October 16, 1964

Glimpses of Early Kashmir: Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*

Dr. Shonaleeka Kaul, Associate Professor, Centre for Historical Studies, JNU.

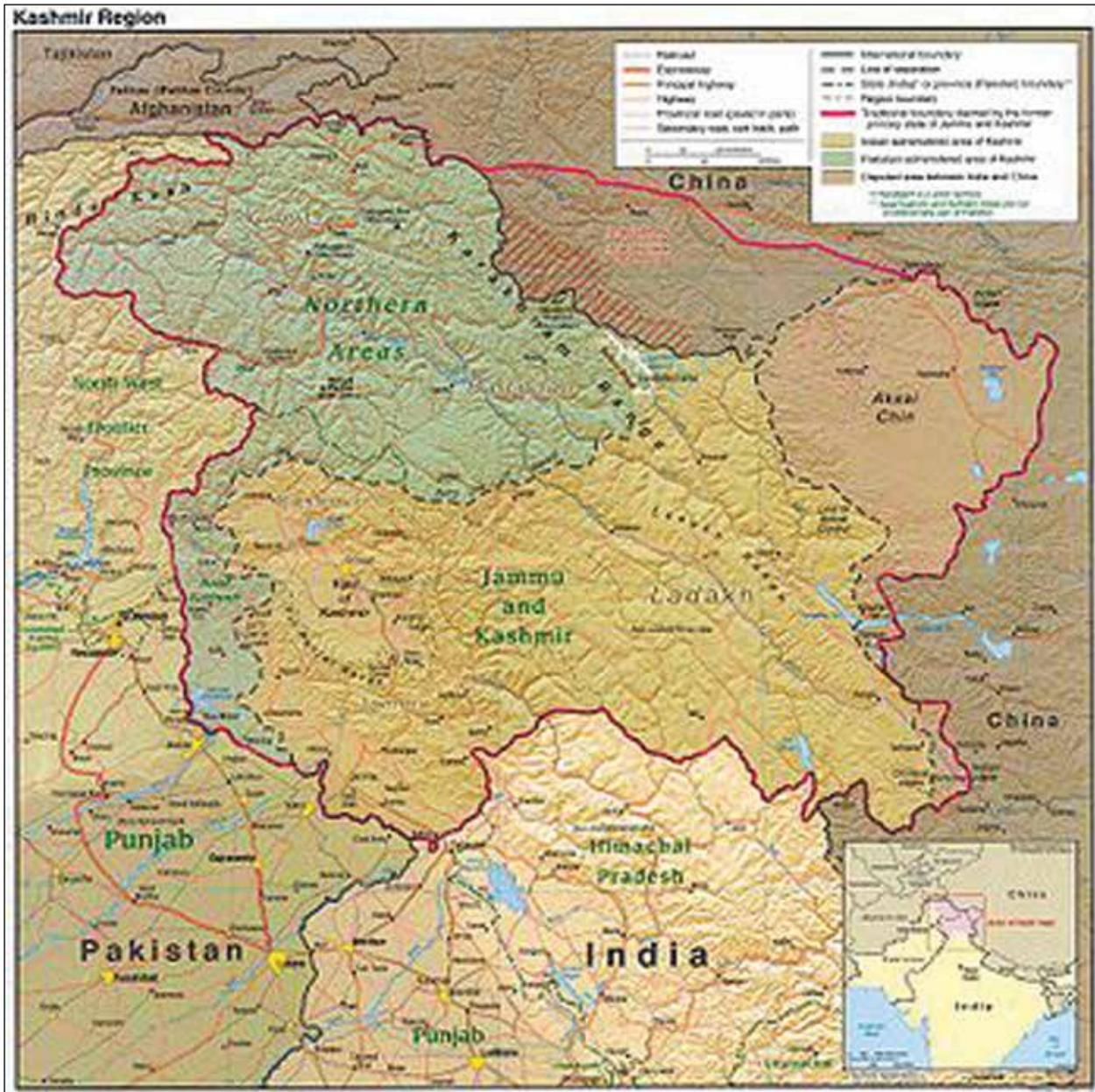
The *Rajatarangini*, or *The River of Kings*, is perhaps the most celebrated historical chronicle from early India. Composed in the 12th century CE, it consists of nearly 8,000 verses (*shlokas*) in Sanskrit composed in the high style of epic poetry (*kavya*). It essentially captures the

genealogies of successive dynasties that ruled ancient Kashmir from the purported dawn of history down to the time of the poet who was a Kashmiri Pandit named Kalhana. But that's not all that the text does. The *Rajatarangini* is a splendid example of how Sanskrit poetry adopted and adapted local motifs, locales and content to a translocal poetics and stood in as the preeminent register of Kashmiri regional self-expression. It has been celebrated by a century of modern scholarship, from the time of the Hungarian-British scholar Aurel Stein, for objective qualities like its deference to chronology, punctiliously ascribing dates to the rise and fall of every regime, and its eagerness



River Jhelum





Kashmir Region Map - 2004

to provide causal explanations for the events it describes. More recent scholarship, however, has shown how in its use of rhetoric, myth, and didactic the *Rajatarangini* excels in symbolizing the land and its lineages.

The *Rajatarangini* is often regarded as the first work of history proper, written in the Indian

subcontinent; however, the text itself tells us that it was preceded by a long line of such works in what was apparently an established tradition of historiography. None but one of those prior texts has survived. Another little noticed aspect is that the *Rajatarangini* clearly draws on other Sanskrit literary genres like *vamsa* (genealogy), *nit* (politico-moral precepts) and *itihasa-purana*

(narratives on the past). Subsequent to Kalhana, three more *Rajataranginis* were composed as sequels that took the history of Kashmir down till the 15th century. Thereafter these were also translated and studied in Persian.

Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* represents the land of Kashmir in a multilayered fashion as a physical space, a political space, and ultimately, as an ethical space (these are discussed below). Indeed it historicizes Kashmir's past via constructing a politico-moral discourse on good governance. Accordingly it classifies the past kings of Kashmir into two kinds: those who followed *dharma* (virtue) and ensured the welfare of their subjects, and those who departed from it and resorted to greed, persecuting their people. In adopting this perspective for organizing his narrative and indeed thousands of years of Kashmir's history, this text was being true to a traditional Sanskrit *kavya*: One of the chief aims of Sanskrit poetry, apart from the cultivation of aesthetic language, was imparting instruction (*upadesha*) in the pursuit of the three goals of worldly life: piety, power, and pleasure. Poets in particular, saw themselves as possessing a divine insight into the real nature of the historical past and Kalhana argues that but for poets of his kind, the ancient kings would be all but forgotten by posterity.

*

The *Rajatarangini* begins its cosmogonic account of the Valley of Kashmir with its waters forming the originary motif. It speaks of the *Satisaras* or lake of Sati, the consort of the great God Shiva, which was filled with water for six aeons. When drained by the gods at the behest of sage Kashyapa, and rid of the resident hydel demon, so named Jalodbhava, this came to be the site where the *mandala* or kingdom of Kashmir was founded. This is the first of several myths in Kalhana's narrative relating to the physiography of Kashmir

which combine geology and tradition. For we know that the geomorphological formation of the Valley did occur from an ancient lake, evidently a memory preserved in myth. Moreover, the valley did not drain out completely and a number of residual seasonal lakes and pools have remained in Kashmir, known to this day as *nagas*. And so in the *Rajatarangini* too, Kashmir is described as the resort of the *nagas*. The river Vitasta (modern Jhelum) that flows through the Kashmir Valley is associated with the goddess Parvati (the great goddess) whom she is said to embody.

What then emerges into view is Kalhana's scheme to sanctify the entire topography by merging the physical geography of the land with sacred geography. Thus a description of the rivers and lakes and mountain peaks of Kashmir is followed seamlessly by an enumeration of the many shrines and pilgrimage spots (*tirthas*) that accompany the physical features of the land. Thus we are told of the sanctuaries of Papisudana, Nandiksetra, Chakrabhart, Vijayasha, Adikeshava and Ishana and of how "in that country adorned by these, there is not so much land as covered by a sesamum seed which is profane." This close association of the very land of Kashmir with spiritual merit initiates a discourse of "the presence of piety and absence of sin" which was perhaps meant to set the stage for Kalhana's ethicized commentary to unfold.

The other form in which water dominates the physical landscape of Kashmir is floods. Havoc caused by water is a recurrent theme even in the largely political narrative, showing up as something successive kings from early on grapple with. The devastation caused by inundation "which turned the land into a sheet of water" and its aftermath, famine, are often described by Kalhana. The measures to drain out the flood waters of the Mahapadma or Wular lake, inundating the country all around, launched under



Aurel Stein

King Avantivarman by an uncommon commoner Suyya, stand out as the most successful, and is reminiscent even to the poet's mind of the original draining of the lake that was Kashmir.

A related force of nature that characterizes the space of Kashmir both in and out of the *Rajatarangini* is heavy snowfall. It emerges as a

recurrent calamity that visits the subjects of the kingdom of Kashmir and even its soldiers when they are out on military expeditions. On one such occasion "smitten by chilly winds and sinking in the muddy fields, soldiers abandoned horses and armour and ran away" or simply had their routes become impassable through accumulation of snow. Snow emerges as verily a factor in the

success or failure of the innumerable sieges and conspiracies that fill Kalhana's chronicle.

Most of all, Kalhana speaks of the grim and awful terror of the famine that follows the blight of untimely snowfall. Interestingly, precipitation is represented as a variant of Kashmir's obsession with the water motif: snow, hail and torrents of rain are presented as the doing of the *nagas*, the tutelary spring deities, who are therefore metaphorically accused of "carrying away the harvest".

That floods and snowstorms, and consequently famine, were endemic to the literary geography of Kashmir is shown by how these phenomena creep into the very literary devices Kalhana employs from time to time in his Kashmiri tale. Thus you have similes and analogies invoking the imagery of, for instance, "rice-land when the crop is ruined by hail and only stalks survive" to describe an army that has lost morale or that of "a brimming lake when it overflows upon the bursting of the dam in the rains" to describe the appearance of a rebel's force.

Other attributes and associations culturally specific to Kashmir are sprinkled all over the *Rajatarangini*, imbuing it with a very special local flavour, as well as pointing to ways in which Kashmir was distinguishable from other places. Thus early in the book Kalhana composes the following miscellany of novel attributes:

"Such is Kashmir, the country which may be conquered by the force of spiritual merit but not by armed force; where the inhabitants in consequence fear more the next world; where there are hot baths in winter, comfortable landing places on the river banks, where the rivers being free from aquatic animals are without peril; where, realizing that the land created by his father is unable to bear heat, the hot-rayed sun honours it by bearing himself softly even in summer. Learning, high dwelling houses, saffron, iced water, grapes

and the like — what is a commonplace there is difficult to secure in paradise."

The reference to surpassing paradise (*tridiva*) is striking for it anticipates the later day construction of Kashmir as a paradisaical space itself in Persian literature. The verse also suggests a combined claim to piety and pleasures for the land, which is described elsewhere as both holy and charming (*ramniyasca punyasca*).

Another description is inspired by natural markers specific to a montane ecology and temperate climate, such as "the verdure of undulating trees", "delightful resin of the pines" and "gleaming like a dish of yoghurt on an auspicious occasion". In a similar vein appear references to fruit and vegetable unique to Kashmir, namely, cherries (*kapittha*), described as "which but for a few days are produced in Kashmir at the advent of the clouds", *utpalasaka*, a bitter green leafy vegetable that grows wild in Kashmir, and lotus root, a delicacy in Kashmiri cuisine. Similarly the reference to fried meats, described as "the soft and unctuous fare of Kashmir which is easy to digest when washed down with sugared water."

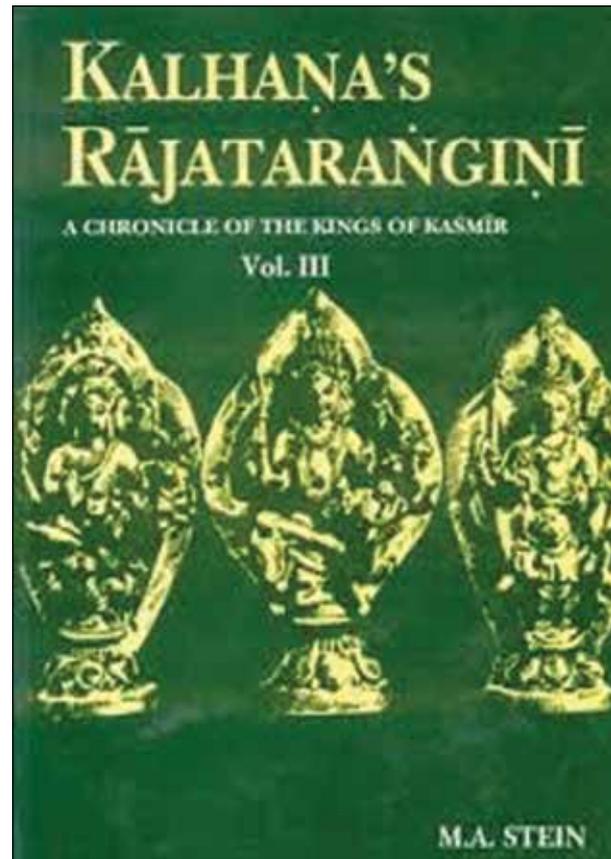
The movement from physical qualities of space to spiritual ones is effected as a continuum in the *Rajatarangini*. Claim to spiritual distinctiveness is made unequivocally in the form of direct statements, such as "the country which may be conquered by spiritual merit, not armed force" and "this kingdom [is] held in veneration by the gods, shrines and sages." It is also said that "The land of Kashmir is Parvati; know its king to be part of (the great god) Shiva. He should not be disregarded even if he be wicked, by a wise man desirous of bliss."

In keeping with this image of piety, all kings and queens, including those who are presented as unscrupulous in the extreme or mindless, massacring tyrants — are recorded as making donations to Hindu temples and Buddhist monasteries. These ritual acts were really

political acts. They were meant not just typically for divine legitimation of rule but as part of other kinds of political communication, like appearing to right the wrongs perpetrated by the previous ruler, or claiming the legacy/mantle of great rulers of the past.

These religious establishments seem to have played yet another role in Kashmir which the *Rajatarangini* uniquely evokes and which may explain some of the intense royal investment in them. This was the fact that the sacred sanctuary also doubled as political sanctuary, an asylum of sorts where kings, sometimes complete with their militia, took refuge either in the troubled course of their tenure or as the ultimate place of rest or recuperation from illness at the end of their reign, if they had got out of it alive. A number of abdicating or dying kings, renunciant princes, invalid ministers and generals are described as retiring to *tirthas* like Vijayesha, Varahakshetra and Chakradhara. More interestingly, these sanctuaries, that were built like fortresses, became veritable theatres of war when ousted kings, rebels or truant courtiers on the run took shelter within their ramparts. The Kashmiri subjects, who often found themselves caught in the midst of civil war and insurrection, are also on one occasion described as fleeing to the safety of some *tirtha*. A notch less, the *tirtha* also emerges as a site for political protest and negotiation when priest conclaves, in a practice apparently special to Kashmir, organize sit-ins and hunger strikes at such befitting venues against royal inaction or actions.

Thus the spiritual land of Kashmir as represented appears also as the restless land, "a country which delighted in insurrection (*upaplavapriya desha*)", "a realm unhappy through its own factions (*svabhedavidhuram mandalam*)," as Kalhana stoically informs us. In this sense it was the antithesis of that political principle closest to Kalhana's heart, namely, a strong monarchy. Indeed Kalhana emerges as a monarchist if ever there was one, not only in direct ways by approbating those kings of Kashmir who wielded



real power, but also indirectly by virtue of his unceasing tirade against all such factors that weakened kings and kingship and with which he populates the political space of Kashmir. These included the militia men and unruly landed elements on the one hand, who often took to arms and joined rebel conspirators or enemy forces. On the other hand, brahmana activists of the kind that organized mass hunger strikes against the king, seeking to bring moral pressure on him, are also caricatured and lampooned by Kalhana, himself a brahmana. That Kalhana recognizes categories like "puppet king" and "phantom king" shows his clear understanding of power as something real and lying in the exercise of strength, rather than notional and automatically vested in the throne.

Most of all, it is the courtiers and official functionaries of Kashmir as a class who are attacked, first of all, for robbing the subjects

and being like a plague for the people since they took bribes, extracted heavy taxation even in drought, and embezzled funds due for the treasury. The second reason they are castigated by the text is their sycophancy, love of intrigue and calumny, disloyalty, and licentious lifestyles. Moral corruption then is seen as the bane of the administration and thereby the cause of the people's woes.

Indeed from the political to the ethical is but a short step for Kalhana. Governance, and kingship itself, are viewed and presented as good or bad according to certain moral principles with which Kalhana frames both his narrative and Kashmir as an ethical space. This is the space, I submit, where you see Kalhana most invested and where his commentarial style is in full flow. Moreover, Kalhana's ethicized commentary is something that runs through the text, from beginning to end, unifying his narrative in a moral logic.

Kalhana leaves us in no doubt as to the organizing principle of his vision by means of what seems to be an opening statement: Early in the first chapter he tells us:

"From time to time, kings appear who organize a kingdom which is sunk deep in disorder. Those who are intent on harassment of their subjects perish with their families; on the other hand, fortune waits on even the descendants of those who reinstate order where there is chaos... this is the feature of each tale..."

He reiterates the point later in the fifth chapter: "The dynasty, fortune, life, wife, the very name of kings, in an instant goes to perdition for those who do evil to the subjects." And in a corollary and elaboration, he observes in the second *taranga*: "Who are even the gods to transgress the command of kings who are pledged to righteous conduct? Single-minded application in protecting the subjects is the sacred duty of kings."

Ensuring these aims were a series of qualities: good conduct, righteousness, generosity/

liberality, discriminating intellect that could tell right from wrong, and which encouraged men of merit, character and learning, and the will to enforce justice (*dharma*) and absence of fear (*abhaya*) among the subjects.

Even as he laid down a model for kingship in Kashmir in this fashion, Kalhana also prescribed certain standards for those surrounding the king. The leading virtue for them was loyalty, and Kalhana every now and then makes it a point to pause his chronicling of the acts of kings to note and valorise an act of loyalty unto death shown by commoners — not only by liegemen for their lord but by courtesan-keepers of the king and even by cooks and cats for their mistress, the queen! Kalhana's intense upholding of fidelity is underlined by his equally passionate denunciation of treason (*droha*), even when it is against a wrongful king. This reiterates his staunch monarchism and simultaneously highlights his emphasis on honour and righteousness in any event. Thus when Harṣa the horrible was deposed and decapitated by the people, Kalhana calls them "sacrilegious" for having "severed like a thief the head of the sovereign."

Beyond models of political and ethical behaviour, Kalhana also inaugurates something of a larger critique of power. This takes the form sometimes of a humanist and sometimes of an ascetic intervention in the monarchical discourse, which also acts as a check on it. In either form, both deepen and elevate the concern for the ethical and the discursive with which Kalhana seeks to inhabit his Kashmir. Thus you get comments like a tanner, an untouchable, equating the king's palace with his humble hut. Thus also comments like: "Everyone might suffer a mischance stripping them of their exalted rank as if he were a commoner. Who indeed can afford to be high and mighty and, obsessed with oneself, persist in conceit?" On another plane, you also get wry comments from Kalhana such as "Curse the crown! for whose sake sons and fathers, suspecting one another, are not able to sleep peacefully at night anywhere in the world."

Then, in a detached, moral and mortal take on power, Kalhana has a king soliloquise thus:

"There is perhaps no man who, having been at first shown favour by Royal Fortune, the sweetheart of kings, has later not been harassed by her, as by the friendship of the vulgar ... She, who is without affection, has never followed kings in death when they without friends or provisions are en route for the next world... Gold vessels of the banquet and other articles collected in the treasury rooms — how is it that those kings who have departed for the next world are not [any longer] owners of them?... Torn from the necks of those [enemies] about to die... the necklaces, accursed and unholy, for whom are they an attraction? After defiling them with hot tears of anguish when about to die, predecessors have left the ornaments behind; while touching them, who does not have a qualm?"

Elsewhere in the *Rajatarangini*:

"Despite efforts to control physical ills and mental worries, [and] even after realizing the transient nature of existence, fools do not give up ambition, seduced as they are by the attractions of treacherous fortune... But on the same path of death is every individual plunging headlong. I am the slayer and he the slain — the notion of a difference [between the two] lasts but a short while... He who but yesterday exults while slaying his foe, at the end sees an enemy gloating over him when he is himself about to be killed. How awful! Fie on this illusion which has brought on dim-sightedness!"

The *Rajatarangini's* relentless recourse thus to the themes of mortality and evanescence of human life and action was not just a sardonic critique of vanity and power but can be seen as a profound deposition on temporality itself and its ever-attendant quality, change. A recognition of this fundamentally historical character of time frames the text in that it begins, too, with describing itself as a balancing remedy, an antidote as it were, for kings who may be seized by change — prosperity or decline — across space

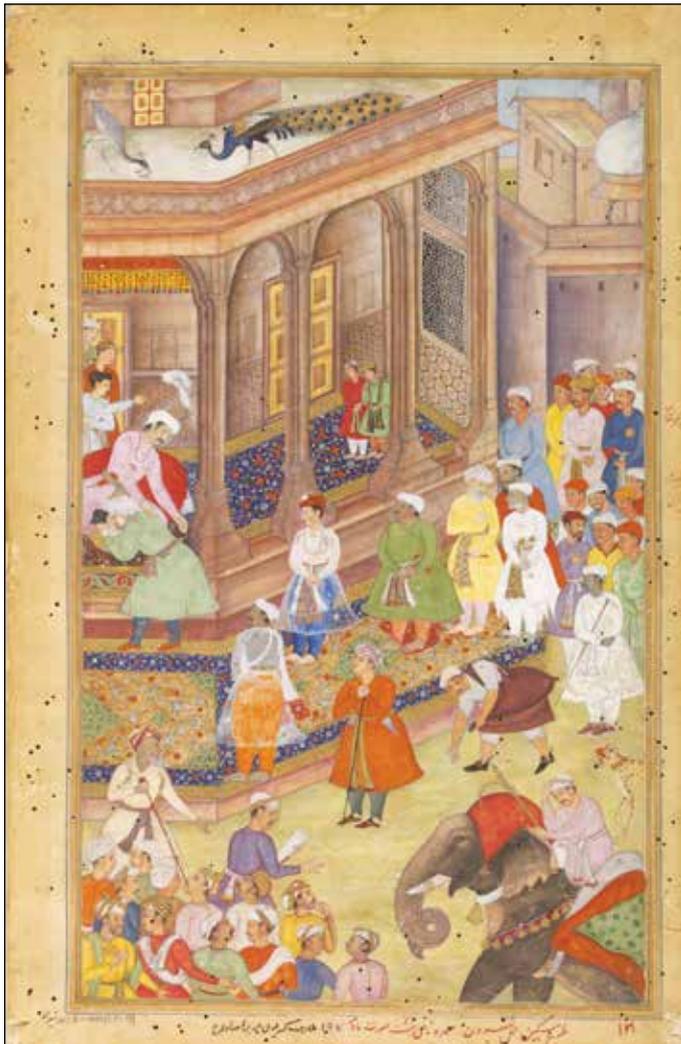
and time. A certain universality and inevitability, then, attach to the march of history in this vision, as also a convergence of transcendent and contingent truths.

*

At multiple levels then, Kalhana constructs a space called Kashmir, a politico-geographical space on the ground but also an ideological space open to the author to organize around moral principles that bring the past and present into a complementary relationship. The centrifuge of this construction is of course the king, for the *Rajatarangini* is of course a royal narrative — but one through which the realm of Kashmir becomes the site and bearer of a vision of which the vantage point is the ethical universe of the Sanskrit world. In this sense the *Rajatarangini* is not just the story of Kashmir but a story for Kashmir as well — a discourse extraordinaire. Whether in his normative prescription of power or in his philosophical critique of it, Kalhana lays out a totalizing overview of a long stretch of Kashmir's history that becomes the organizing principle for his discourse on it. In emplotting Kashmir's past thus, he narrativizes it, and it is in narrativizing it that he historicizes it, by lending shape and meaning to a vast swathe of time and the innumerable historical figures and events entailed by it. For Kalhana writing history did not exhaust truth; moralising reality was more the goal. Hence the didactic concerns of the *Rajatarangini* framed the dynastic narrative of Kashmir within the larger project of creating ethical monarchy and governance, evaluating every actor and episode on a politico-moral barometer for qualities such as justice, loyalty, high-mindedness, temperance, liberality, and people's welfare. Over and above these, it sought to unveil the transcendent end of human life — the supreme ethic, detachment — not as a goal in itself but as a wider insight into the nature of change over time and as a means of putting in perspective the ultimate reality of all human action.

Akbarnama, a Sixteenth Century Chronicle of India

Meena Bhargava



Abu'l Fazl ibn Mubarak Presenting *Akbarnama* to the Mughal Emperor, Akbar. Mughal Miniature.

A *kbarnama*, a sixteenth century chronicle of India, a biography and a history of the reign of the third Mughal Emperor, Akbar was written in Persian by Abu'l Fazl 'Allami, one of the *Navratanas* or Nine Jewels of Akbar's court, but more significantly a close associate and confidante of the emperor. Fazl, son of Shaikh Mubarak, a Sufi saint of the time, was extended imperial patronage and offered a courtier's position by Akbar in 1574. Reacting to the invitation, Abul Fazl, as he tells us in the *Akbarnama*, went through an inner conflict. He 'looked upon external circumstances as destructive of inwardness and limitation as opposed to absoluteness'; his intellectual and spiritual leanings and his desire to reach the ultimate truth convinced him of the futility of a courtier's life. It was allegedly on the persuasion of Shaikh Mubarak that Fazl joined the imperial service. His learning and rationality impressed Akbar, especially during the religious discussions and debates in the *Ibadatkhana* (House of Worship) that strengthened the critical and analytical ambience of the imperial court,

subjecting the '*ulama*' (religious elite) to challenges on issues of reason and tolerance.

Commissioned by Akbar in 1589, to write the official history of his reign, Abu'l Fazl informs us that it took him seven years to complete the work during which he prepared several tentative drafts but found them consistently unworthy in style and disposition and therefore incessantly modified them. Being a perfectionist, he apparently wrote the drafts of the *Akbarnama* five times. Not impressed by his creativity, when he was on the verge of the sixth revision, he was compelled to close it on the insistence of the emperor and formally present it to him on March 21, 1595. It is evident, nonetheless, from *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* (completed in 1593), the work of Nizamuddin Ahmad Bakshi, also a chronicler at Akbar's court, that earlier versions of the *Akbarnama*, including *Ain-i-Akbari* was made available to the contemporary scholars and chroniclers of the imperial court as early as 1592, the year in which he himself referred to the *Akbarnama* in his historical composition. For narrative and partly for style, the model text for *Akbarnama* like for any other Timurid chronicle was Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi's *Zafarnama*, a history of Timur, Akbar's ancestor, written in 1424-25 that used official records



The Defeat of Hemu. Illustration from *Akbarnama*, c. 1590s.

as *asnad/isnad* (sources). *Akbarnama*, however, went beyond it, basing itself on a large repository of archival material. The writing of the *Akbarnama* was preceded by intense chronicling, history-writing and specially commissioned memoirs of courtiers, servants and family members at Akbar's court – for instance, Mehtar Jauhar Aftabchi's (Humayun's ewer bearer and barely literate) *Tazkirat-ul-Vaqi'at* also known as *Tarikh-i-Humayun* and *Humayun Shahi*,



Battle Scene with Boats on the Ganges, 1565. Illustration from the *Akbarnama*.

revised subsequently and offered in a more sophisticated form by Ilaahdad Faizi Sirhindi (who was in the process of writing the history of Akbar's reign), Bayazid Bayat's (native of Tabriz, who later joined the Mughal army under Humayun), *Tazkireh-i-Humayun va Akbar* and Gulbadan Banu Begum's (Babur's daughter) *Ahval-i-Humayun Padishah*. These biographies were a response to Akbar's orders in 1587, to the 'servants of the state' and 'old members

of the Mughal family' to pen down their personal memories of Babur and Humayun to facilitate the affirmation of the dynasty's legitimacy and construct the official imperial past. In addition to these, which served as valuable archives in the creation of the *Akbarnama*, was Fazl's access to the contents of the imperial records office – reports, *yad-dasht* (memoranda), *farmans* (royal orders).

Abu'l Fazl had visualized the *Akbarnama* and the *Ain-i-Akbari* as a single *magnum opus*: the separation of the first two *daftar*s (volumes), *Akbarnama* from the third *daftar*, *Ain-i-Akbari*, referred to as *daftar-i-akhir* or *jild-i-akhir* or the last volume by Fazl, now treated as a separate book, is the contribution of the later editors and translators of the text. *Akbarnama* was intended as five volumes; four of which were to constitute the narrative, covering a period of 30 years of Akbar's life, presuming that Akbar would live for 120 years and that Abu'l Fazl would outlive the emperor to complete the account of the latter's life. *Ain-i-Akbari* was slotted to be the fifth volume. Notwithstanding the plan, Fazl could write only three volumes: two *daftar*s of the part on the narrative i.e. the *Akbarnama* and the third *daftar* i.e. *Ain-i-Akbari*, which included the *khatima*

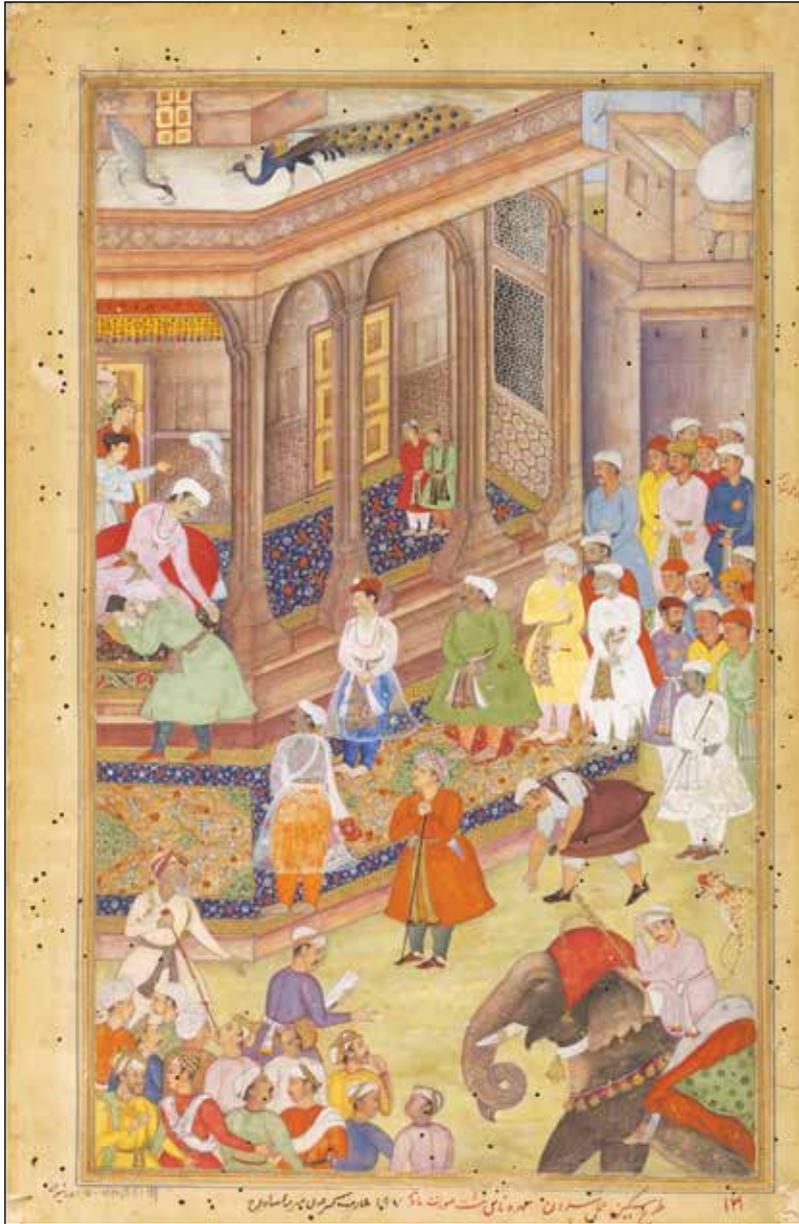
(conclusion) to the entire work. *Akbarnama* (including the *Ain-i-Akbari*) has dominated Mughal historiography for successive generations projecting 'imperial images as imperial realities' and is considered by many as a 'foundational' source not only for its alleged accuracy and objectivity but also for being an official record, compilation that provided details on issues related to administrative, agrarian and institutional aspects. Some have regarded the work as representing rationalism, tolerance, complete absence of religious fanaticism and secular vision, while others view the *Akbarnama* as 'a personal puff for a pal'. For some, with the writing of the *Akbarnama*, Abul Fazl became both a name and a legend in Mughal historiographical literature for promoting concepts and a perspective of history and skillfully combining the Arab and Persian traditions of history-writing.

The first volume of the *Akbarnama* that focuses on establishing the dynastic and political legitimacy of Akbar purports to write the 'history of mankind', beginning with the praise of *Allah* and without mentioning Prophet Muhammad and the four Caliphs, moves on to Adam, the first man; Akbar's birth; his horoscope, delineated cautiously in the various Greek, Persian, Ilkhanid, Indian astrological traditions;



The Court of Emperor Akbar. Illustration from the *Akbarnama*.

and his ancestors. Fazl traces Mughal ancestry back through Timur and Chingiz Khan to the mythical Mongol Queen, Alanqoa/ Alanquwa, impregnated by divine light, whose children, one of whom an ancestor of Chingiz Khan's nine generations before, was also the progenitor of the Mughals. Her day of conception, says Abu'l Fazl was *aghaz-i-zuhur* or 'the beginning of the manifestation



Emperor Akbar greeting Rajput rulers and other nobles at the Court, 1577. Illustration from the *Akbarnama*.

of his Majesty (Akbar)'. Through this volume of *Akbarnama* that ends with the seventeenth year of Akbar's reign, Fazl makes a profound departure from Islamic historiography by disengaging not only *tarikh* (history) from its Islamic lineage but also Akbar's political heritage from its Islamic bonds, and projects Akbar as the 53rd generation descendant of the first human being (Adam), claiming that Akbar was the ruler of all humanity and not a 'Muslim' ruler. The narrative of the second *daftar* ended abruptly in the 46th regnal year of Akbar with Abu'l Fazl's assassination

in the first half of the 47th year. This volume contains minute details on government and administration, conquests and campaigns, tactics and technology employed therein, topography, astrology and elephants. Akbar apparently, as also reported by Jesuit Father Monserrate, a visitor to the emperor's court, was fond of watching and taming the *mast* (mad) elephants. Whatever the information in the *Akbarnama*, every word is, directly or indirectly, related either to the emperor personally or his empire or his reign; where the common man was not Fazl's concern although they served as a background to explain the history of the empire and the emperor. *Ain-i-Akbari*, the third volume, was virtually complete by 1598, with a minor addition of the conquest of Berar made in 1599. The point at which the portion of *Ain-i-Akbari* ended, the narrative of *Akbarnama* began once again, tracing it back to 1589 to the end of the 46th year of the rule. Different from the narrative character of the first two volumes, *Ain* is a kind of a gazetteer, with a strong archival base, rich in statistical accounts of *subas* (provinces) that reflects on Fazl's skill in interpreting and arranging data of different categories. Its addiction to statistics of all types: revenue and financial data, regulations of various departments, rates

of prices and wages, social and cultural information, geographical descriptions (his awareness of the Ptolemaic system), summary of Hindu philosophy and sciences, makes the *Ain*, as suggested by some scholars the 'base-line' for the economic history of India. The commitment of *Ain* to scientific and philosophical tradition is apparent by its chapter on the origin of metals, discussion on technology and a chapter on economy (*Rawai-i-Rozi*). The latter demonstrates the logic of argument that Fazl imbibed from the scientific and philosophical texts by first describing the 'natural state of mankind' in which no protection to 'property, life, honour and religion' was forthcoming, thus invoking the principles of Social Contract and a rational theory of kingship, much before Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*, 1651), which empowered Akbar to challenge the power of the '*ulama*' (religious elite).

Asserting a definite philosophy of history in the *Akbarnama* based on *asnad* (original sources); analytical and rational recording of individual experiences and achievements; rejecting the orthodox view that history enlightened the 'believers' only, Abul Fazl, a follower of the *ishraq* tradition (the philosophy of 'illuminated wisdom' of Shihab-ud-Din Suhrawardi Maqtul



Emperor Akbar taming Mad Elephant, Hawai, c. 1590. Illustration from the *Akbarnama*.

(1155-1191) and *wahdat-ul wujud* (philosophy of 'unity of being' of Ibn al-'Arabi 1165-1240) denounced *taqlid* or blind fanaticism, rejected the formalities of religion – prayer and invocation – and emphasized on the spiritual content in religion and *sulh-i-kul* or universal concord or absolute peace and '*aql*' (rationality) and appealed to the tradition of the philosophers (*filasafa*) and the scientists (*hukama*). *Akbarnama* ostensibly displays the intellectual temperament of Fazl and his interest in philosophical



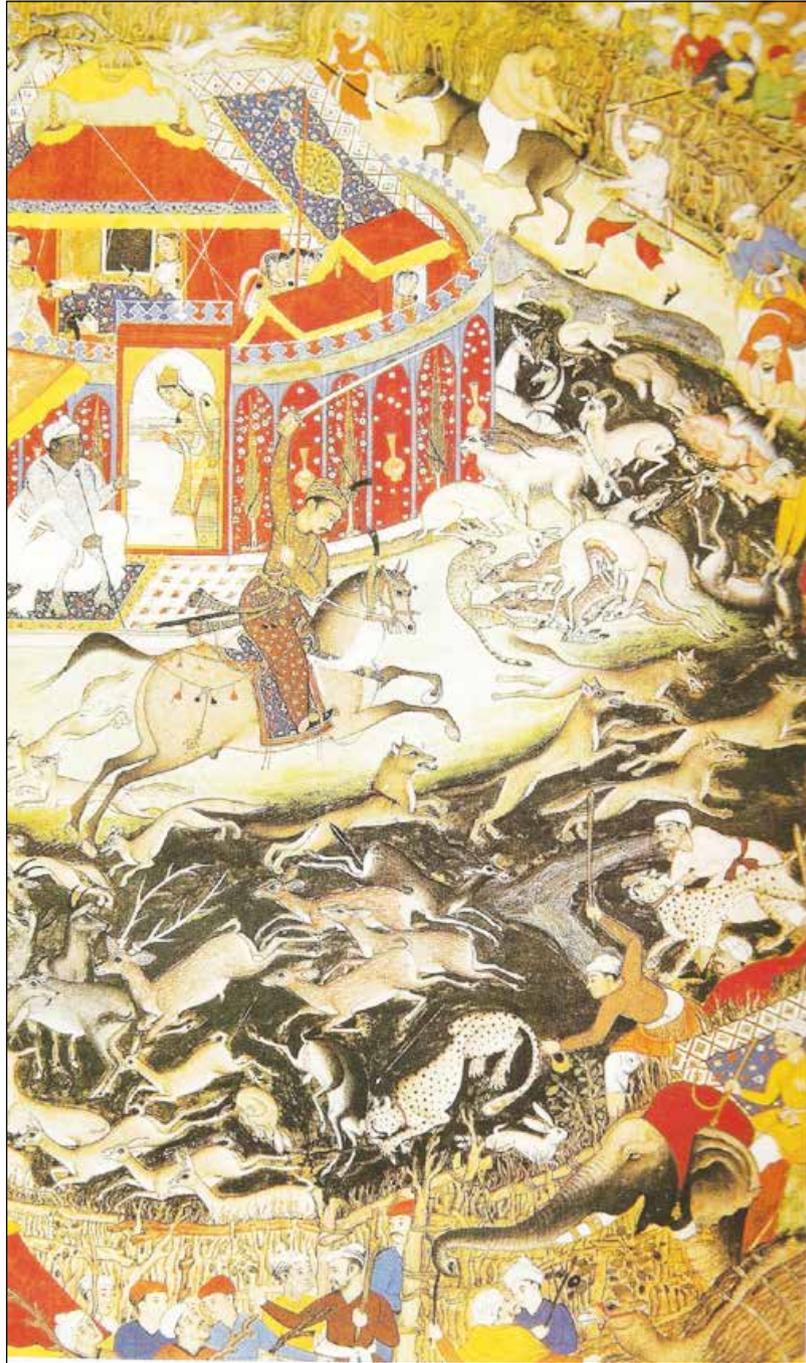
Young Abdul Rahim Khan-i Khana being received by Emperor Akbar, c. 1590-95. Illustration from the *Akbarnama*.

speculation, indicating that the philosopher and the Sufi in Fazl outdid the historian, and that ethical and moralizing elements dominated historical analysis. Notwithstanding, a philosophical or scientific temper (*mushrib*), his espousal of rationalism appears strange, rather odd, and is not in consonance with his critique of the irrational behaviour of the '*ulama*' when he describes the

'holy manifestations' preceding the birth of Akbar and virtually immortalizes him drawing upon Sufi and *ishraqi* theories of the divine illumination of kingship, presenting the emperor as an ideal, inclusive, benevolent ruler, an extant personification of 'masculine virtues and exemplar for his servants'. Such contradictions in the *Akbarnama* point towards Fazl's theoretical imperfection, which perhaps he could never come to grips with and therefore made no attempt to resolve it. Instead, he accepted that recording the achievements of an ideal ruler like Akbar was worship for him and that veneration for the emperor amounted to adoration, which may be considered his weakness.

Abul Fazl formulated a powerful dynastic ideology in the *Akbarnama*, glorifying Akbar as the 'king of manifestation and reality', 'the living embodiment of the empire' and the 'focus for the direct personal devotion of the imperial nobility'. Exuding prolific admiration, Fazl highly cherished Akbar as an *ummi* (illiterate) expounding the emperor's unlettered status as prophetic and a mark of divinity. All prophets, he elaborated, were illiterate. Moreover, it was incumbent on all parents to continue the tradition by allowing one of their sons to emulate the prophets. Akbar possessed, says Fazl, '*ilm laduni*'

i.e. knowledge directly from God. *Akbarnama*, though, traces the Mughal history from the first Mughal Emperor, Babur to 1602, of Akbar's reign. The persistent focus is on Akbar, he is the centre of all things, the leader of *din-u-dunya* (religion and realm), with magical powers (*karamat*) who did not need to seek any legitimacy. Such extraordinary representations of Akbar – both spiritual and political – make the *Akbarnama* read like a panegyric account, an encomium of his reign and as if virtually co-authored by the emperor. Akbar not only keenly pursued and evaluated his biography to see how he was being presented but the eulogistic details, too, of Fazl matched the emperor's ambitions; it seemed, as some scholars have argued that Fazl wove Akbar's 'unspoken wishes' into the matrix of a philosophic system. It appears thus, that even if Akbar, partially contributed to the creation of his official image in the *Akbarnama*, as if he is being seen the way he wanted to be seen, then the *Akbarnama* should be seen as 'an intersection between hagiography, biography and autobiography, providing a continuum between Akbar, the court, some contemporary perception and hagiographic inscription'. The third *daftar*, *Ain-i-Akbari*, even though idealized, stands in stark contrast to the hagiographic style of the first two *daftar*s i.e. *Akbarnama*. While it exhibits Fazl's



Emperor Akbar hunting with *Cheetahs*, 1602. Illustration from the *Akbarnama*.

competence and ability to manage quantitative data of a variety – territorial, ethnographic, prices, salaries, fiscal and revenue rates, it also provides comprehensive information on the organization of the empire and administration, ranging from institutionalized establishments like the imperial household, army, mint,

amusements, etiquette, astronomy, medicinal and philosophical ideas, details on animals particularly the *cheetah* (leopard) – its hunting, training, co-habitation and diet. Recognizing thus the importance of such information and regulations for the empire, *Ain-i-Akbari* signifies the value of official archives and establishment of a quasi-bureaucratic state.

Akbarnama and *Ain-i-Akbari* were a means to convey the authority of Akbar to the imperial officials and the court; Fazl's strategy was to establish that not only the imperial regulations of the *Ain* but the history as exemplified in the *Akbarnama* was 'philosophy teaching by example' and as the *Ain* stated it was 'a lesson book for the instruction of mankind' and a 'moral treatise for the teaching of subjects in the right conduct of life'. These references have been seen as incidental to serious contemporary political history but in fact they had an important political purpose and were significant in the formation of the imperial service and projecting the emperor as divinely-ordained, *insan-i-kamil* (perfect man) and a *mujtahid* (spiritual guide, or one who can, or has the right to interpret the law) who possessed *buland iqbal* (good fortune). Attributing to Akbar the concept of *farr*, 'divine glory', derived from the ancient Iranian concept of *khwarena*, the 'divinely sanctioned kingship', Abul Fazl stated that royalty is a light emanating from God – it is a ray from the sun that illuminates the universe. Invoking the theory of illumination in the *Akbarnama*, derived from the Persian Neoplatonic philosophy of Shihab-ud Din Suhrawardi Maqtul, which suggests that all life is given existence by the continuous illumination – almost blinding – from the East of the Light of Lights or God; that all men possess a divine spark but only the highest of three grades of men are the true theosophists or the masters of the age: men such as Suhrawardi himself, Plato and in Abul Fazl's interpretation, Akbar; that a chain of dazzling

angels reveal God's illumination to man and that above these angels was Angel Gabriel identified with the true spirit of Prophet Muhammad. Fazl averred that a combination of divine illumination and virtuosity enabled Akbar to achieve *sulh-i-kul* (universal concord or absolute peace). He does not refer to his monarch in conventional terms i.e. *Zill-i-ilahi* or 'God's shadow' but calls him *paziranda-i-farr-i-izidi*, a recipient of divine light, possessor of illumined wisdom, and the reflector of the light received. But all worldly sovereigns, stipulated Fazl, did not receive such light. It was only the just and an enlightened ruler who could receive God's light and possess the title of *Padshah*, for it was only the enlightened one who could distinguish between the 'godly ruler' (*farmanfarma-i-haqiqi*) and the self-seeking authority (*peshi-ju-i-khwud-kam*). While the 'godly rule' was marked by peace, harmony, justice and longevity, the reign of the selfish monarch was characterized by cruelty, theft, terror and was short-lived. For Fazl, as enumerated in the *Akbar Nama*, Akbar fulfilled the parameters of a just, enlightened, 'godly' rule. The emperor possessed a large and courageous heart, paternal love and tolerance towards his subjects (*pidari*), bestowing on them the title of *farzand* (son) if the need be to show favour, believed in God but rejected *taqlid* (blind fanaticism) and religious differences, fulfilling Fazl's fundamental social outlook that all men formed one brotherhood and that there was a basic cultural identity between Hindus and Muslims. Taking his cues from Nasir-ud-Din Tusi's *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, a work of ethics composed in Persian in 1235, (a book most often read to Akbar), Fazl in his *Akbarnama* projects Akbar as the emperor who maintained harmony among the four classes of mankind: *ahl-i qalam* ('men of pen' or the learned); *ahl-i-saif* ('men of sword' or warriors), 'men of negotiation' – merchants, traders, tax-collectors and 'men of husbandry' – farmers, agricultural labourers. *Akbarnama* thus takes the view of Akbar as a monarch who had

the wisdom to understand the spirit of the age, which made him a perfect ruler. Presupposing the evil nature of man – corruption, selfishness, greed and lust – Abul Fazl located the basis of sovereignty in the needs of the social order and talked of the necessity of a monarch, envisioned as benevolent, sacred, sublime but despotic all the same, like Hobbes's *Leviathan*, assisted by four sets of 'state servants' – nobles; assistants of victory, revenue-collectors, in-charge of income and expenditure; companions of the king or wise learned men in the court; *khansama* or household servants – with complete, absolute, autocratic control over them. His vision and justification of monarchy in the *Akbarnama* was somewhat similar to that mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, a Hindu mythological text. In the said book, Bhishma, the warrior-sage, traces the origins of kingship and talks of Prithu, the seventh in the generation of rulers, endowed with divinity and supreme invincible powers, successful in restoring calm and stability and putting an end to the confused, anarchic order of the time. Abul Fazl's monarch i.e. Akbar as described in the *Akbarnama* also possessed such awesome qualities, who by his omnipresence brought concord and compassion in the empire and constructed a 'Hindustan' that could stand out in the world.

Analyzing Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama* and trying to ascertain why he wrote the way he did for Akbar, some scholars have argued that this was a period when hopes and fears had been aroused in the popular Muslim mind by the approaching Islamic millennium and Fazl probably felt that disputes amongst the religious leaders could be effectively handled by claiming unsurpassable, prophetic, supernatural powers for the emperor – a status above the ordinary rulers. Nevertheless, it was his obsession with Akbar that attracted several critics to the *Akbarnama*, many of whom accused Fazl of sycophancy, of concealing the truth about the emperor and for being the *mujtahid* (spiritual guide) of Akbar's 'new religion' *Tauhid-i-Ilahi* (divine monotheism), popularly known as *Din-i-Ilahi* that in their opinion promoted apostasy and heresy in the empire. A major critic of the chronicle was Fazl's contemporary Mulla Abdul Qadir Badauni, a theologian, scholar and a historian in Akbar's court. Censuring Fazl and his *Akbarnama* for travesty of truth, Badauni represented diametrically opposite and subversive opinion on the official history of Akbar's reign, Badauni's work, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* ('Choice of Histories') is a valuable counterpoint and a counterbalance to the hyperbole of Fazl's *Akbarnama*.

Harṣacarita

Kanika Kishore

“Thus no reign has been stainless except that of Harca, king of kings, sovereign of all continents. These and the like great undertakings do we see, resembling those of the first age of gold. Therefore, we are eager to hear from the beginning onwards in the order of his lineage the fortunes of this auspiciously named hero, rich in the merit won by noble deeds. It is long since we desire to hear.”¹

The above expressions of curiosity led to the penning down of the text *Harṣacarita* (seventh century CE) by Bāṇabhaṭṭa, the court-poet of Harṣavardhana (c.606 to 647 CE), a king of the Vardhana dynasty of Thāneśvar (Haryana) and Kānyakubja (Kanauj). The association with royalty has always been held high in society and a person on whom this favour is bestowed is thereafter considered highest. In this regard, Bāṇa after his visit to Harṣa’s court was given a grand reception by his relatives and friends who wanted to hear his tale of royal splendour.

Harṣacarita is written in the classical Sanskrit language and consists of eight *ucchavasas* (chapters). Bāṇa refers to this text as *ākhyāyikā* meaning a historical account.² This chronicle is embedded with beautiful poetry within a historical framework. Before the content of the text is revealed, let us familiarise ourselves with the important characters of this text namely, the king Harṣavardhana, Prabhākaravardhana (Harṣa’s father), Yaśovatī (Harṣa’s mother), Rājyavardhana (Harṣa’s elder brother), Rājyaśrī (Harṣa’s younger sister), Grahavarman (Harṣa’s brother-in-law) and Bāṇabhaṭṭa (Harṣa’s court-poet). In addition, the story also acquaints us with the names of Bāṇa’s friends and cousins and finally, with certain other personages, such as Mekhala (king’s messenger), Yaśovatī’s brother’s son Bhaṇḍi, *senāpatī* (commander-in-chief) Simhanāda and Divākaramitra, the Buddhist teacher.

An interesting aspect of the *Harṣacarita* is that although it narrates the deeds of the king Harṣa,



Coin of Harṣa, National Museum, New Delhi.

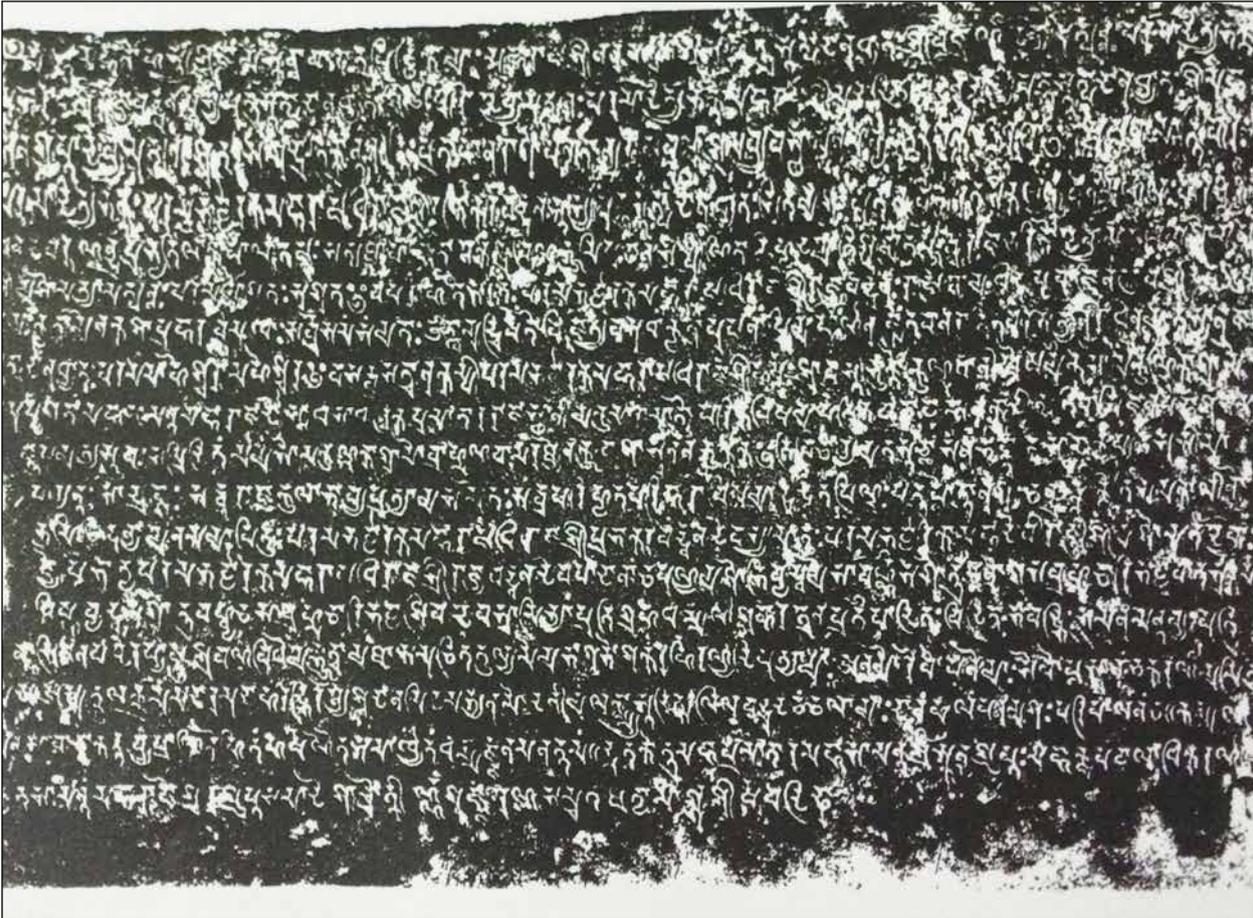
the author also makes sure that readers are well acquainted with its composer. In fact, the story begins with Bāṇa receiving an invitation at Harṣa's court which is followed by a grand reception given by his relatives and friends who are eager to know about his stay. In fact, the first two chapters exhaustively discuss his lineage, life, family, relatives, friends and education. He states about his mythological origin and his belonging to the Vātsyāyana gotra. Bāṇa mentions his home town, a village named Prītikūṭa (a village in the Kānyakubja region) and also introduces himself as the son of Citrabhānu by a brāhmaṇī woman named Rājadevī. In childhood only, he had lost his mother and his father died when he was around fourteen years. The text informs

us that he belonged to a family of learned Brahmins. His strong intellectual background is reflected upon his very first meeting with Harṣa, as he states that he has thoroughly studied the Vedas with its six *aṅgas*, and also heard lectures on the *Śāstrās*. Bāṇa also had a huge circle of friends and he names forty-four of them. This list even included his personal attendants such as betel bearers which indicate his influential background. Actually, Bāṇa had been fortunate, as his father had left considerable wealth for him and later the patronage of Harca obviously made him wealthier.

An interesting facet of this text is the changing relationship between the king and the author. A



Banskhera Plate of Harṣa, year 22, contains actual signatures of Harṣa.
(Source: *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. IV, plate 20)



Madhuban plate of Harṣa, year 25, mentions Harṣa as devout worshipper of Maheśvara or Śiva.
 (Source: *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. VII, plate 17)

considerable space in *Harṣacarita* explains to its readers the indifferences between him and the king. In fact, Bāṇa states how the king refuses to meet him as the latter did not pay respect to the emperor which the former expected him to do. In addition, he also mentions how others had filled the king's ears against him. So, in order to ensure that the king was not misguided further, he narrated his educational background, but unfortunately Harṣa did not pay any heed to that either. However, Bāṇa still believed that the king would appreciate him and gradually the king realizing his true worth, invited him to his court. Thus, he re-entered the royal palace and was bestowed with the highest degree of honour, dignity and wealth. So, his entry was by no means very smooth into the royal court. However, the

text makes us believe that his exit was positive as the king had bestowed upon him wealth and favours.

Consequently, it is not surprising that Bāṇa leaves no stone unturned to elevate his patron in the text. Still, he manages to paint the picture of the society and some actual episodes of Harṣa's life. The tale of royal splendour begins with the mention of Śrīkaṇṭha Janapada, where Parama Māheśvara Puśpabhūti was the king. The description of the Vardhana dynasty begins with Harṣa's father king Prabhākaravardhana and his mother Yaśovatī and the birth of their two sons (Rājyavardhana and Harṣavardhana) and daughter (Rājyaśrī). The text mentions Harṣa's birth under an excellent combination of planets

and predictions that he would become foremost among seven *cakravartī* kings.

The story then revolves around members of the royal family including the marriage of Rājyaśrī with Grahavarman and her elder brother Rājyavardhana being sent by the king to defend the empire against the Hūṇas. Later, the tragic part unfolds with the death of king Prabhākaravardhana and consequently, Queen Yaśovatī also ends her life. Finally, the news of the death of their brother-in-law is received, which fills Rājyavardhana with the resolve to avenge this loss from the Mālavas which he pays with the cost of his own life. Then, Harṣavardhana becomes the king and marches to take revenge against the king of Mālava. Finally, the king searches for his sister with the help of Divākaramitra, a Buddhist monk and it ends with her union with Harṣa.

Harṣa is described as an *avatāra* of all the gods amalgamated in one, and is described with attributes of Indra, Kṛṣṇa, the Sun God and even Buddha and Jina. In fact, Bāṇa writes to the extent that Harṣa's royalty had even surpassed that of the gods. Interestingly, the text makes several

efforts to justify Harṣa's claim to the throne. *Harṣacarita* highlights that he had followed the law of heredity and it had been free from any discord. The text elucidates how Rājyavardhana (Harṣa's elder brother) declares his abandonment of the sword and his inability to conquer and his desire to take refuge in a hermitage. Later, when Rājyavardhana loses his life fighting against the Mālavas, Simhanāda (*senāpatī*) asks Harṣa to comfort the unprotected people and he is referred to as the only Śeṣa left to support this earth. Thus, Bāṇa indicates a smooth and voluntary transfer of the throne from Rājyavardhana to Harṣa.

Rājyavardhana has been discussed in three contexts by the author. First, in the context of the Hūṇa campaign and second in the context of the avenging the death of his brother-in-law and insult meted out to his sister. Finally, his acceptance of life in a hermitage instead of sovereignty, is also explained in the text.

Rājyaśrī is another important personage in this text. In fact, the story is woven around two important episodes associated with her life. Interestingly, the episodes receive more vivid



Aihole inscription of Pulikeśin II, mentions war between Harṣa and Pulikeśin II (Chalukya ruler).
(Source: *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. VI, plate 1)

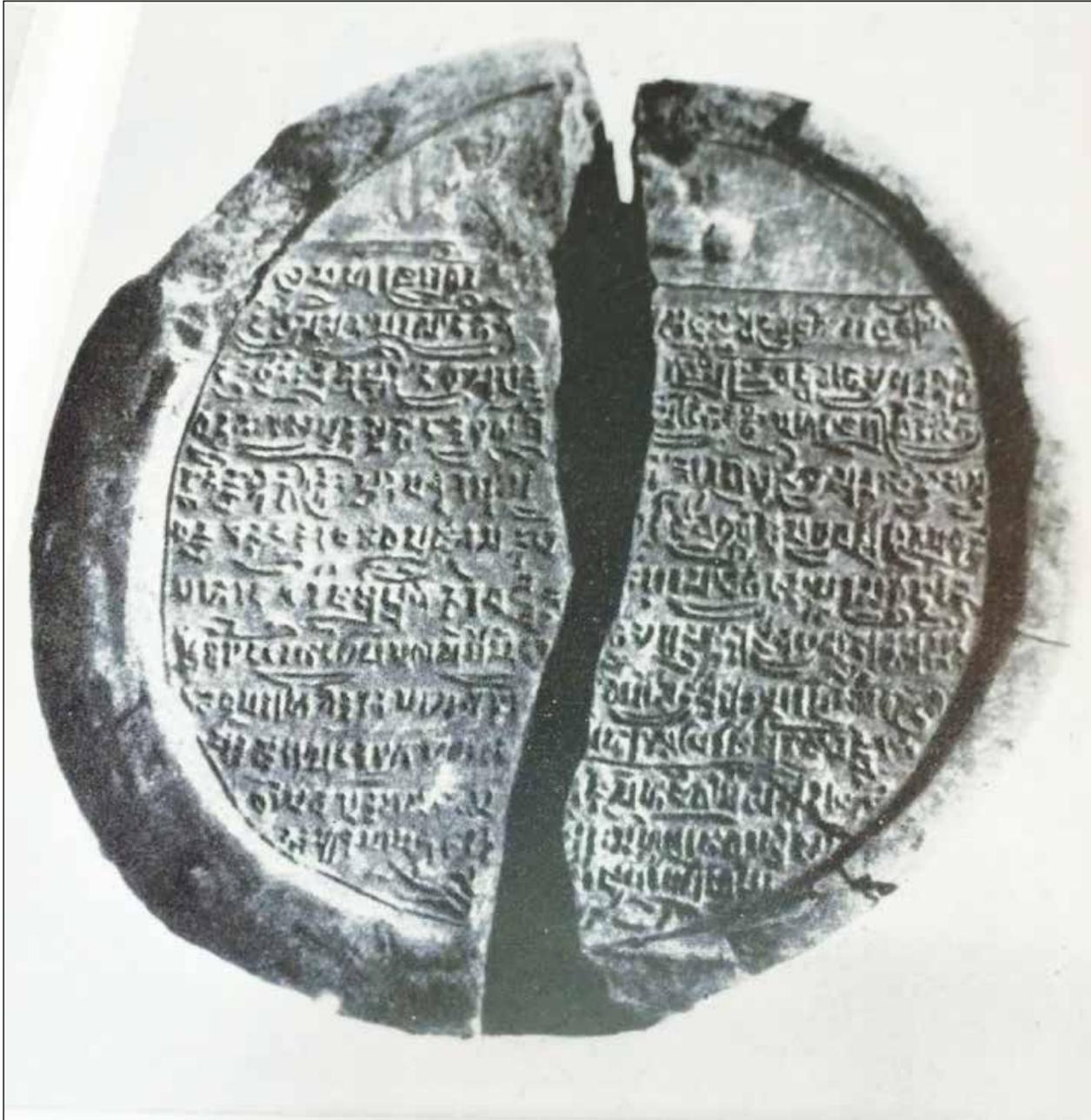
descriptions than Rājyaśrī herself. The *Harṣacarita* provides us with the most graphic descriptions of her marriage. However, it is also clearly mentioned that her marriage is the union of two lines of Pushpabhūti and Mukhara. So, clearly the marriage seems to have been a political alliance. The second important episode is Harṣa's onset on a journey in search of Rājyaśrī. Harṣa's plight is explained well by Bāṇa in the following words spoken of Harṣa, "Having lost all my loving kindreds, I found link with life only in my young sister."³ After searching the Vindhya forests with the help of Divākaramitra, the Buddhist teacher, Harṣa saves Rājyaśrī from entering the funeral pyre. The last lines of *Harṣacarita* describe her as the fortune of the royal house and also mention that the royal seal was brought by her. The fact that the text ends with Rājyaśrī handing over the seal to Harṣa implies that she also had an integral role to play in the sovereignty of the king.

The text informs its readers about *satī* (the term is not used, though the practice is narrated) both in the context of Yaśovatī and Rājyaśrī. While the former ended her life in this ancient practice, the latter was saved from doing so. The text describes Yaśovatī wearing a scarf of red colour holding a painting of her husband in her hand, before she entered the funeral pyre.⁴ A helpless son Harṣa was moaning at the loss of his mother and forced her to turn back her decision. It further narrates how the queen became filled with extreme sorrow seeing her son in this condition. She is also described as bursting into tears like an ordinary woman. She explains to Harṣa, "It is not that I wish to abandon you, but I would die while still unwidowed. I cannot endure to live as a widow in separation from my lord and saying so she fell at Harṣa's feet."⁵ Although Yaśovatī dies, Harṣa saves his sister from this fate. The wailing women narrate the incident in the following words, "O brother wind, hasten to tell the king Harṣa that the princess is burning!"⁶

The text further mentions that Harṣa took her away from the fire to the foot of a nearby tree. Thus, Harṣa saves his sister from ending her life on the funeral pyre.

Thus, the words used in the text make its readers feel the emotions of its personages. In the royal household, the anxiety of a daughter's parents is illustrated beautifully by Bāṇa, when the king, says to the queen, "As soon as ever girls near maturity, their fathers become fuel to the flame of pain."⁷ To this the queen adds with tearful eyes, "Mothers your majesty are to their daughters no more than indeed nurses, useful only in rearing them. In their bestowal, the father is the judge. Love for a daughter however far far exceeds love for a son; pity causing the difference."⁸ Similarly, the tragic events make the reader feel the pain. For instance, it is mentioned how Harṣa's heart was instantly splintered into a thousand pieces, hearing about his father's declining health. In order to paint the full picture, Bāṇa also mentions the conversations held amongst the attendants who were seated in the rooms and spoke in whispering tones about the king's declining health in terms of physicians having not done a proper diagnosis, or the disease being incurable, or it being a bad omen.⁹ Thus, the text furnishes us with mixed emotions of pain and love.

Harṣacarita informs us that Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism prevailed in that period. The Śaiva affiliations of Harṣa is revealed through his indulgence in Śaiva rituals and worship.¹⁰ In addition, the author of the text himself is also a devout Śiva worshipper. For instance, Bāṇa is mentioned as washing the image with milk and offering worship to Śiva. Apart from the royal household and the author, the text mentions that the worship of Śiva was popular in each family in Sthāṇvīśvara. The text also refers to the great Śaiva saint named Bhairavācārya and a list of Pāśupata teachers. We also have



Nalanda seal of Harṣa, mentions the genealogy of king Harṣa.
(Source: *Epigraphia Indica* Vol.XXI, plate 11)

references to Indra, Brahma, Varuṇa, Govinda, Lakṣmī, Mātṛikās and Jātamātṛi (presiding deity of children). The text also mentions many religious sects and philosophical schools, for instance, Śvetapama (Śvetāmbara) Bhāgavatas (Vaiṣṇavas), Kapila (followers of Sāṁkhya School of Kapila), Lokāyatika (Cārvāka), Aupanishada

(followers of Upaniṣads), Pāñcarātrika (followers of the Pāñcarātra School of Vaiṣṇavism) to name a few, among several mentioned in the text.¹¹

The *Harṣacarita* informs us about the names of several texts, including the *Vedas*, *Mahābhārata* and the *Vāyu Purāṇa*. The recitation of Vedic

hymns is also referred to in the text. For instance, whether it was the birth of Harṣa, or the illness of king Prabhākaravardhana, the earnest Brahmins were occupied in muttering Vedic hymns. Further, there are references to hundreds of *Mahābhāratas* and its various characters such as Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Aśvattāman, Karṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna.¹² In fact, when Bāṇa's cousin asks him to narrate his stay at Harṣa's court, they refer to his story as a second *Mahābhārata*. There are also references to hundreds of *Mahābhāratas* and its various characters, such as Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Aśvattāman, Karṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna.¹³ Finally, the verses of the Vāyu Purāṇa being recited among Bāṇa's circle of friends also records references to the *Harṣacarita*.

The text also mentions Vyāsa and Kālidāsa, who are praised for cultivating beautiful expressions in their verses. Interestingly, with regard to poets, in the beginning verses of the *Harṣacarita*, Bāṇa mentions that 'a poet is not considered among good' and is detected as a thief by his only changing words of former writers and by concealing the signs of different styles.¹⁴ This seems to perhaps hint at plagiarism as we know it today.

The *Harṣacarita* also throws sufficient light on how manuscripts were kept in ancient times. They were tied in a cloth over which a long cord was tied several times. There is also a reference to *tāla-patra*, being used for writing books with ink made by mixing soot with red lac. The *Harṣacarita* also informs us about the production processes of inscriptions. For instance, the wounds on the chest of the senāpatī are described as if engraved with a chisel, which we know were used for engraving inscriptions. In fact, Harṣa when he swears that he would clear the earth of the Gauḍas, gave instructions that a proclamation be engraved. All these verses are corroborated by the discovery of several epigraphs attributed to Harṣa.

The *Harṣacarita* also makes us reconsider the notion of literary which is considered as bare

minimum in ancient India. This is known from the second chapter of this text which records references to subjects namely, *vyākaraṇa*, *nyāya*, *kāvya*, *Śāstras*, *mīmāṃsā*, *karma kāṇḍa* and *Vedapāṭha* being taught in villages. In fact, the text mentions Bāṇa's enquiries about boys pursuing their studies and the continuation of an unbroken daily application to the Veda, grammar exposition. All these questions suggest the rich record of academic and educational activities in villages.

We notice the various kinds of professions in two places; first in the exhaustive list of the forty-two friends of Bāṇa and second in the description of the Sthāṇvīśvara region. Bāṇa's friends included poets, composers in Prakrit, bards, learned scholars, readers of books, writers, storytellers, painters, gold ornament makers, goldsmiths, workers in clay. Others include tambourine players, flute players, musicians, music teachers, dancers, actors, Śaiva teachers, Jaina monks, Buddhist nuns, physicians, snake-charmers, alchemists, dice-players, gamblers, magician, betel bearers, female toilet attendants and a female shampooer. With regard to the second reference, the text mentions how men and women followed several professions here. The place abounded in munis, courtesans in their quarters, dancers having their music halls, students concentrated in their *guru kula*, sharp-witted fellows in their special clubs (*vima-goshṭhi*), bards, persons living by professions of arms, artisans, caravan-traders, Śākya munis, dancers, musicians, magicians all found their desired abode in this region.¹⁵ We also get to know that certain professions were hereditary. For instance, there is a reference to a young doctor named Rasāyana, who mastered the *Āyurveda* and is mentioned as holding a hereditary position in the royal household.¹⁶ The counsellors of Harṣa's court were also hereditary as is revealed in the text.

Bāṇa beautifully describes Śrīkaṇṭha, the kingdom of Harṣa and refers to it as being a heaven of Indra, where only ideal conditions of happiness prevail



A rare portrait of Xuanzang.
(Source: T. Watters, 1961 *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India* (A. D. 629-645), Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal)

for people. From the text, it can be implied that Harṣa's empire extended upto Sindhsāgar doab and the Indus river formed its boundary. The text mentions that Rājyaśrī was captured at Kanauj and Harṣa seized it later. Bāṇa also mentions his own village and of the places he had visited on his way to the royal court.

The text describes each and every chamber of the palace as the story unfolds. For instance, it is specified that Harṣa was seated in the public audience hall which was located in the second court of the palace, when he received the news of the death of Rājyavardhana. The feudatory and other kings waited upon the emperor in the outer hall of public audience. With regard to *sāmanatas*, various kinds of them are mentioned throughout the text. Bāṇa gives an elaborate description of the seasons with the help of flowers associated with the particular seasons, winds and the effects of the changing weather. For instance, the summer season is described by a reference, "lakes getting dry, sparrow's eggs being exploded and heated rocks being bedewed with bitumen."¹⁷

Harṣacarita also describes in great detail Harṣa's army and mentions how the king worshipped arms and weapons by sprinkling sandalwood paste on them, that wore the royal insignia.¹⁸ The various ways in which elephants were procured for the army and how they were trained for the army are also mentioned in great detail.¹⁹ Among other interesting details, we notice a record reference to ice and white and brown sugar as early as the seventh century CE.²⁰ The text also mentions that various kinds of crops, such as paddy, sugarcane and the fruits of date-palm, orchards of peach fruit were grown here. Bāṇa also mentions various fabrics: cotton, linen and several types of silk. The mention of the Persian wheel in the *Harṣacarita* indicates its early usage.²¹

The text also informs us about funeral ceremonies, magical beliefs and bad omens. The funeral ceremonies are explained in the

context of the ones performed after the death of Prabhākaravardhana. For instance, the bone relics and ashes of kings were sent to different places and a monument of brick was raised on the funeral pyre of the king.²² Regarding magical beliefs, there is a mention of a kind of unguent or paste, the application of which ensured safety across the ocean.²³ Finally, three bad omens are mentioned which Harṣa encounters upon receiving the news of his father's illness. These were deer passing from right to left, a crow on a burnt out tree uttering its dreadful cry and a naked Jaina, bedecked with peacock tail feathers. The text further mentions that such inauspicious depictions deepened his apprehensions.²⁴ It is strange to notice that a naked Jaina is considered a bad omen. *Harṣacarita* makes it clear that Jainism and Buddhism prevailed in this period, as discussed before. In fact, there seems to be a good interaction between Jainism and the other prevalent religions. This is also borne out by the poet that Bāṇa, who belonged to a family of learned Brahmins, but also had in his list of friends, a Jaina monk and a Buddhist nun.

To conclude, we can say that though emperors build empires, but it is really writers who truly serve the ruled and fill in the missing pages of their lives and conquests. In this regard, the former task was accomplished by king Harṣavardhana and the latter by his court-poet Bāṇabhamma. The author in this text furnishes us with many details about Harṣa's reign which would otherwise have remained unknown. However, we do not attempt to say the author in writing this chronicle wanted to write history in the sense we understand it. But yes, we can infer a lot of history from this text. The fact that this text mentions the name of twenty-eight kings before Harṣa who had suffered a downfall fate by their lapses, definitely indicates a historical sense in the writing style of the author.

Harṣacarita is also not a blind eulogy as many of the things stated in the text, have been corroborated by inscriptions. For instance, a grant

by Harṣa dated to the middle of the seventh century CE, mentions Harṣavardhana as a devout worshipper of Śiva.²⁵ Harṣa's interest in Buddhism is shown when he says to Divākaramitra (a Buddhist mendicant), that he would wear the red garments of the faith after accomplishing his tasks, which hint at his inclinations towards Buddhism. This is also later corroborated by Harṣa's invitation to Xuan Zang (a Buddhist pilgrim) to his court. However, some of the important personages of this text, do not find any parallel in other sources. For instance, there is no mention of Rājyaśrī in inscriptions pertaining to Harṣa's reign.²⁶ Whether this is a deliberate omission in inscriptions is an important thought, owing to the fact that the *Harṣacarita* ends with her handing the royal seal to Harṣa. This act is self-explanatory and helps readers to understand the connotations associated with sovereignty in the Vardhana dynasty. In fact, this makes texts such as *Harṣacarita* indispensable as they reveal to us unknown but extremely important characters of the Harṣa royal household. Truly then, *Harṣacarita* is one of the important repositories for the reconstruction of the reign of Harṣa in the seventh century CE. Till today, no study on this period and this king can be considered complete without referring to this text. For us, the road paved by this text is a never ending one, for the more we know, the more there is to know from the *Harṣacarita*.

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- 3 Agrawala (1969): 231.
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- 7 Cowell and Thomas [1968] 1993: 122.
- 8 Cowell and Thomas [1968] 1993: 123.
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- 12 Cowell and Thomas [1968] 1993: 63.
- 13 Cowell and Thomas [1968] 1993: 63.
- 14 Cowell and Thomas [1968] 1993: 1-2.
- 15 Agrawala (1969): 77-78.
- 16 Cowell and Thomas [1968] 1993: 143-45.
- 17 Cowell and Thomas [1968] 1993: 36-37 and Agrawala (1969): 39.
- 18 Agrawala (1969): 167-68.
- 19 Agrawala (1969): 157-59.
- 20 Agrawala (1969): 120.
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- 22 Agrawala (1969): 142.
- 23 Agrawala (1969): 155.
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The Composition and Circulation of Mughal Chronicles

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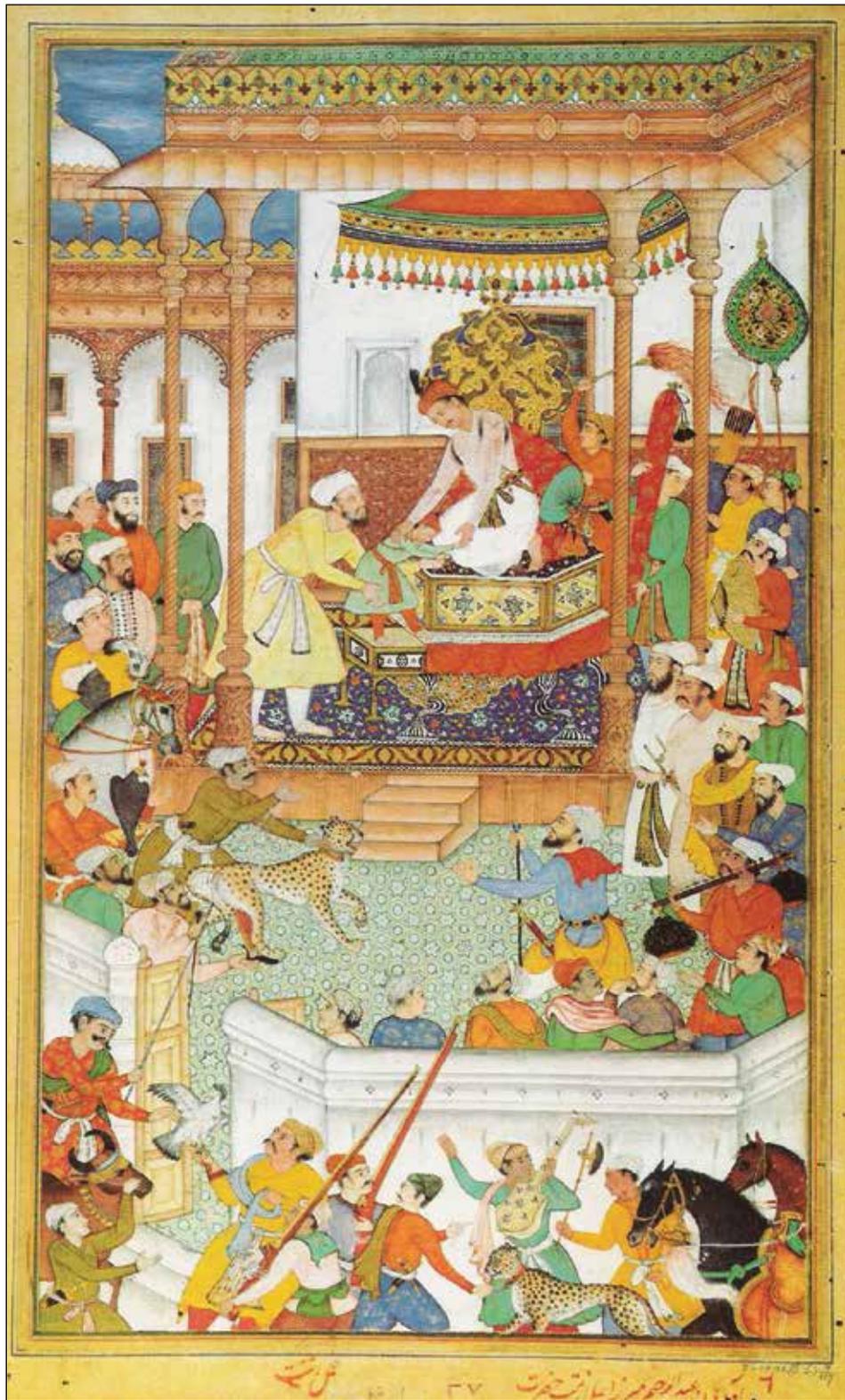
The Mughal dynasty was established in India by the Timurid prince, Zahiruddin Babur, in 1526 as a result of his victory over the Afghan regime of the Lodis in the battle of Panipat. Babur was a Turk from his father's side (going back to Timur) and a Mongol from his mother's (going back to Chingiz Khan), although the memorable term Mughal (anglicized Mongol) was given to the dynasty by the Indians. Babur's autobiography, *Baburnama*, written in Chaghtai-Turkish, is a historical and literary specimen of his Turco-Mongol heritage. *Baburnama* is also an important source of information for the land and people of India in the early sixteenth century.

The real founder of the Mughal Empire was Jalauddin Akbar (1556-1605) who ruled over a large part of the subcontinent inhabiting an estimated 100 million people in about 1600 AD. Akbar was responsible for unifying the regions of the Empire politically and economically through a series of steps, such as crafting a multi-ethnic but uniform bureaucracy, monetizing taxation and circulating standardized tri-metallic currencies. A rank holding Mughal officer (*mansabdar*) could be a Central Asian (Turani), Iranian, Rajput or Khatri (such as the finance minister Raja Todarmal), who collected taxes from the peasants in *muhrs*, *rupiyas* and *paisas*, kept the lion's share for official

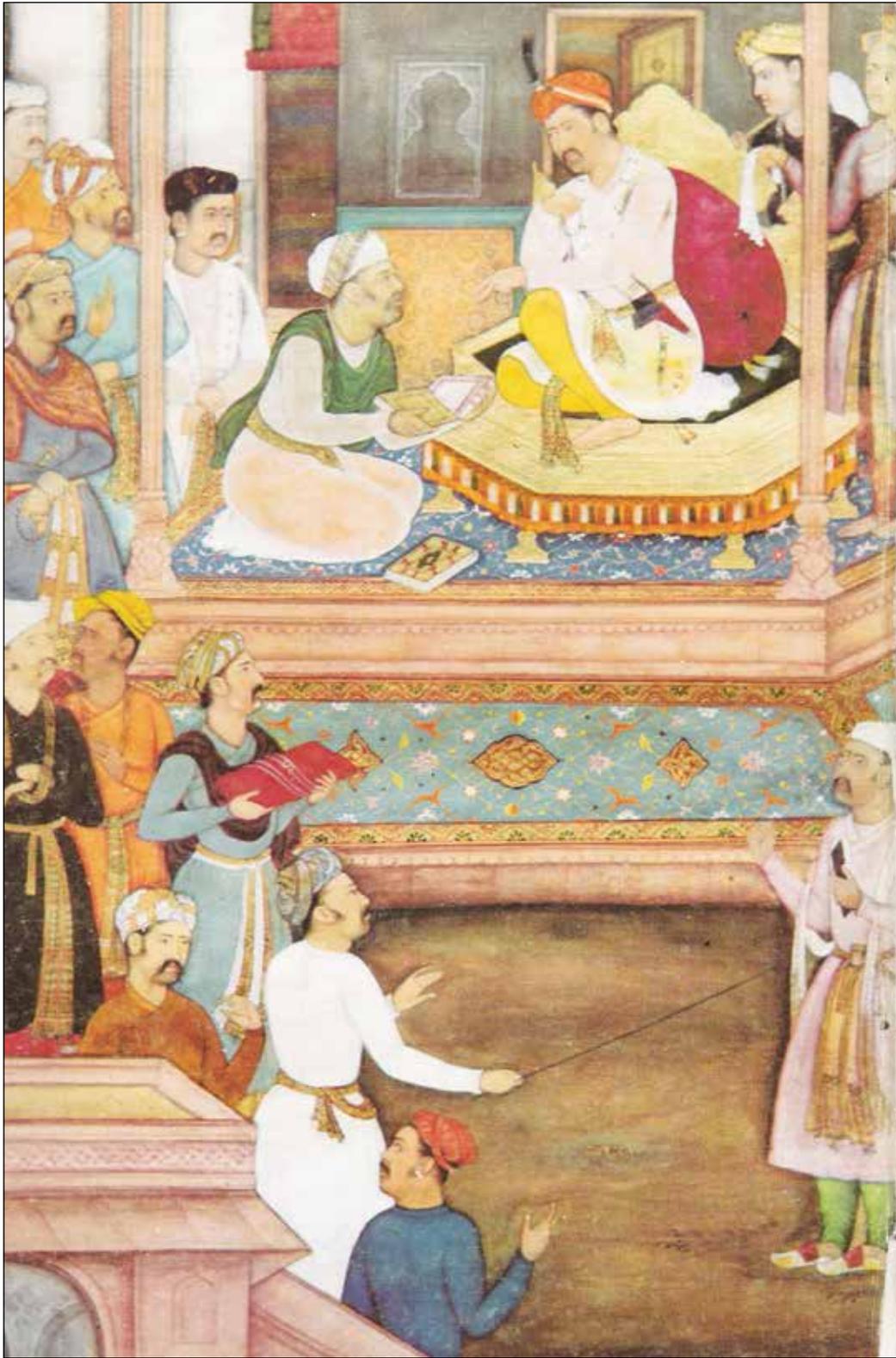
and personal expenses and remitted the rest to the central treasury. Much of the money made in the countryside was spent by the imperial ruling class based in cities on craft goods (fine fabrics, exquisite utensils, jewelled weapons) and services. Cities with magnificent architecture were the hallmark of the Mughal civilization.

The language of Mughal administration and high culture was Persian which was present in India from the days of the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526). Persian, written in the Arabic script like Urdu today, originated in Iran and spread over Central Asia and India. In Akbar's court, *Baburnama* was translated from Turkish into Persian by Abdur Rahim Khan i Khana, a high ranking noble known also for his poetic compositions in Hindi. Persian literary culture flourished in Mughal India and a large number of works were written on various subjects within and outside the court. Among these were books of history often called chronicles or accounts of events organized in order of time. What separated histories from plain chronicles was the principle of selecting and interpreting facts based on a certain philosophy.

The focal point of Mughal court chronicles was a divinely ordained monarch ruling over a peaceful and prosperous Empire. The monarch was chosen



Abdur Rahim presented as a child to Akbar by Anant (Victoria and Albert Museum, London)



Abul Fazl presenting Akbarnama (Chester Beatty, Dublin)

by God because of his pedigree and perfect personality and the purpose of his rule was to maintain a stable and just social order. Akbar's court historian, Abul Fazl, likened kingship to a flash of light from God (*farri i izadi*) which fell first on the monarch and then, in diminishing quantity, on his courtiers and those who had the good fortune to be in his company. The divine mandate was premised on a covenant between the king and his subjects in which he protected their life, property, honour and faith and they accepted his rule with obedience. Ideal monarchs had an able nobility and soldiery permeated with the values of the polity. Such a theory of kingship aided the creation of a non-sectarian state and contributed to the longevity of the Mughal rule.

A major historical work that communicated the ideal conception of Mughal rule was the *Akbarnama*, a grand general history of Akbar and his Empire written by Abul Fazl in 1596 AD. Once completed and presented to Akbar (Illustration), the book was still added on, year after year, until 1601 AD. when Abul Fazl fell prey to a conspiracy hatched by Prince Salim (later Jahangir) and his lieutenant, Bir Singh Bundela.

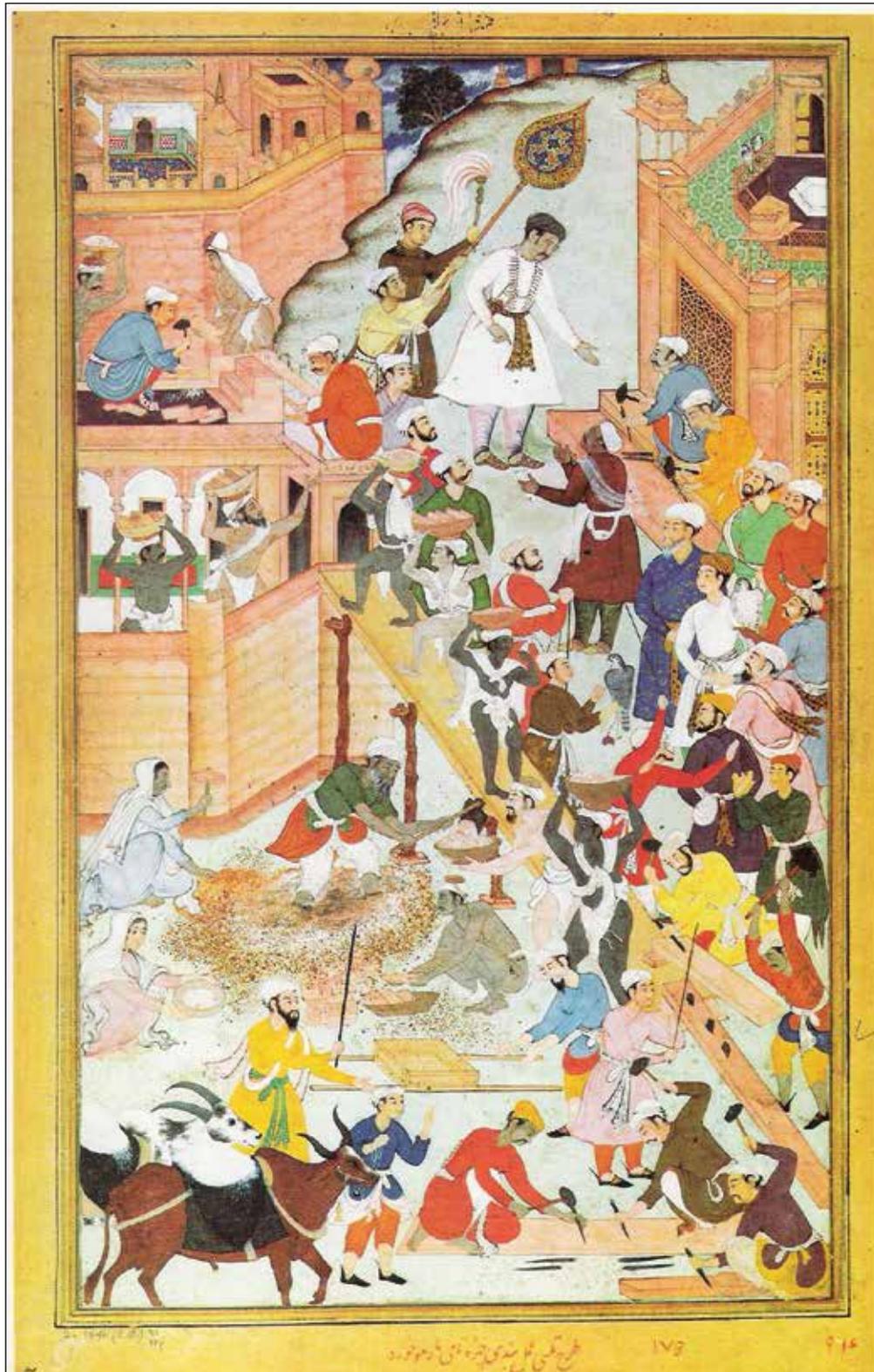
At the time when Abul Fazl joined the Mughal court in 1574 AD, Akbar had developed a keen interest in an eclectic and spiritual life and had begun to cherish humanitarian values which, as emperor, he wished to put into practice. Towards this end, Akbar needed ideological support against the conservative nobility and religious scholars (*ulama*). Abul Fazl, as an independent thinker and opponent of conservative elements, emerged as the emperor's ideological counsellor as well as his court historian.

The *Akbarnama* is divided into two parts. The first is the narrative part containing the history of humankind from Adam to 1601 AD. Abul Fazl's account begins from Adam to show that his

patron stood at the pinnacle of the progress of humanity. The book is structured in a way that detailed treatment of political events begins with Akbar's birth while early histories were touched upon only briefly. Although the *Akbarnama* glorifies the achievements of Akbar and his officials there is no compromise with the veracity of facts drawn mostly from actual records of events (*waqai*), official documents and the oral testimonies of knowledgeable persons. Conflicts are portrayed in political terms and rebellions are doomed to failure.

A notable work written at the behest of Akbar to be used as source material for the *Akbarnama* was Gulbadan Begum's *Humayunnama*, the first book ever written by a woman. Gulbadan was Humayun's sister and well versed in both Turkish and Persian. The *Humayunnama* gives rare access to activities of the Mughal *harem* which housed female family members of the emperor as well as a large body of servants and visitors. Among the events described in the book is a fabulous feast organized to celebrate Humayun's victory on the bank of the river Yamuna in Agra which was attended by many women of the aristocracy.

The second part of *Akbarnama* is a distinct work that is better known as the *Ain i Akbari*. It is not arranged in a chronological sequence, like the first part, and deals with Akbar's administration and empire as well as the culture of India. The *Ain i Akbari* contains five books, in which the first three cover a wide range of subjects such as the treasury, currency and mint, imperial kitchen, art of calligraphy and painting (*Ain i taswir khana*), royal arsenal and animal stables, qualities required of men appointed to important posts, taxation (called 'wages of sovereignty'), including detailed tables of cash revenue rates for each province and average rates of ten years (*dahsala*). In the third book, there is an account also of territorial divisions of the Empire (*suba*),



Akbar supervising the building of Fatehpur Sikri fort by Tulse and Madho Junior (Victoria and Albert Museum, London)



Construction of the Agra Fort by Miskin and Tulsi Junior (Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

describing its geography, resources, statistical tables and brief dynastic annals. The fourth book (*Ahwal i Hindustan*) describes the various philosophical concepts of the people of India and their customs and manners. The fifth book (*Guftar i dilawez i shahanshahi*) consists of a chapter on the 'heart-warming sayings' of Akbar, a short conclusion and an autobiographical sketch of the author. The *Ain* is specifically meant to be some kind of a gazetteer of qualitative and quantitative information that remained unique in the historiography of India until the appearance of the imperial gazetteer in the 19th century.

Jahangir (1605-1627) decided to write his autobiography which doubled up as a court chronicle. Divided into regnal years, the *Jahangirnama*, is a meticulous documentation of public and private events in the life of the Emperor. Jahangir has kept the language and style simple and tried to be as open as possible in a memoir which was designed to be circulated in India, Iran and Central Asia. The recent discovery of Jahangir's night sessions (*majalis i shabana*), languishing in Lahore in a single manuscript, opens up a new perspective and shows that his views on religion, politics, poetry and painting here are more free and frank and some of them appear in edited versions in the *Jahangirnama*. After recording the events of twelve regnal years, Jahangir ordered the folios of the prospective *Jahangirnama* to be bound into a book and circulated, the first copy going to his favourite son, Khurram (later Shahjahan). In 1622 AD, Jahangir stopped writing due to illness and dictated his memoirs to an official of his court, Mutamid Khan. It appears that the hype created by Jahangir's public and private memoirs encouraged enterprising individuals to sell its forged copies in the market which must have greatly annoyed the emperor. Mutamid Khan's position as the imperial scribe must have leveraged a three volume chronicle of Akbar and Jahangir which he wrote later.

At the turn of the seventeenth century, two schools of Persian language and style had come into existence, viz. Indo-Persian and the purely Persian. The language of the Indo-Persian school was ornate and ponderous and its first outstanding representative was Abul Fazl. He set an example in which meaning was often sacrificed to the requirements of rhythm and diction. The Indo-Persian style developed because it was excessively patronised at court, and there were a large number of writers who wanted to write like Abul Fazl. Also there was an indefinable charm in the Indo-Persian style (*sabk i hindi*) which excited admiration in the heart of an Indian, but which was positively annoying to a foreigner (Iranian and Central Asian). Shahjahan also looked for a writer who would be able to chronicle the account of his reign on the same model. *Padshahnama* is the official history of the reign of Shahjahan which consists of three volumes (*daftars*) each of which comprises a period of ten lunar years. The history of the first two decades of Shahjahan's reign (1627-47) was written by Abdul Hamid Lahori, who, as a pupil of Abul Fazl, was the celebrated master of the style of composition in Persian introduced by his teacher. Infirmities of old age prevented Lahori from proceeding with the third decade which was completed by his disciple, Waris.

The writing of official histories received a setback during the reign of Aurangzeb who refrained from projecting a grandiose vision of his sovereignty and stopped the project in the tenth regnal year. The incomplete work, *Alamgirnama*, is in tune with Shahjahani chronicles in language, style and accuracy. Private histories flourished much more than before as a result of drying up of official patronage and tended to be critical though less accurate.

Two private chronicles written in the sixteenth century deserve special mention. The first was



Shahjahan honouring Prince Aurangzeb at Agra before his wedding: painting by Payag. It shows the emperor seated on high in the balcony of the *Diwan i Khas* attended by Prince Dara Shukoh and Prince Murad Bakhsh. Aurangzeb, dressed in a yellow *jama* (upper garment) and green jacket with little blossoms, salutes (*taslim*) his father from below, his right hand raised to his forehead. The princes too were among the subordinates of the emperor since there was no notion of collective sovereignty. The rows of courtiers attending the emperor wear gorgeously coloured robes shimmering with gold, silver, pearls and precious stones. Scholars on the left can be spotted from their big turbans. Two eunuchs fan the emperor with yak hair flywhisks. Windsor Castle *Padshahnama*

written by Humayun's personal valet, Jauhar Aftabchi, who stayed close to him for over two decades including his exile in Iran and Kabul after Sher Shah Sur (1540-45) established the second Afghan empire. Jauhar heard and remembered a lot and his reminiscences are an intimate portrayal of triumphs and discomfitures of his master entitled *Tazkirat ul Waqiat*. Jauhar was barely literate but wanted to be remembered as one which drove him to dictate his memoirs to a professional scribe. Akbar was pleasantly surprised to learn about the memoirs and ordered one of his courtiers to polish it. Today we have both the versions, the simple original and the ornate palimpsest.

The second is an antithesis of the *Akbarnama*. Written in secret without official sponsorship, the *Muntakhab ut Tawarikh* of Abdul Qadir Badauni it gives the views of an intellectual and courtier who became deeply disappointed with Akbar's views and policies. Badauni's complete independence from fear or the desire for favour gave him a unique and valuable perspective. Except when Badauni was personally involved, he adds interpretation, not information, his facts frequently coming from the *Tabaqat i Akbari* of Nizamuddin Ahmad. The latter was the first history in which the vantage point is the country, India with its regions, and not a political dynasty. Chronicles dedicated entirely to a region were also written in Mughal India and became a rich source for local history and culture.

All Mughal books were manuscripts since they were hand written either by the author or by a scribe. There was a big market for writing and copying books and an Englishman in seventeenth century Gujarat observed that the Mughal state was not in favour of printing books because it would have thrown a large number of people with families out of employment. The quality and circulation of a work could be considerably

enhanced by a nice calligraphic hand (*nastaliq*) of a reputed scribe. An eminent calligrapher of Shahjahan's reign was Muhammad Amin Mashhadi, who copied the exquisite manuscript of the *Padshahnama* which was taken from Lucknow in the eighteenth century and is now in the imperial library at Windsor Castle, England. The preparation of multiple copies of a manuscript was designed to ensure the survival and wider circulation of the work of an author. Akbar's poet-laureate, Faizi, brother of Abul Fazl, translated the famous Sanskrit romance, *Nala-Damayanti*, into verse and presented a copy to Akbar along with a few gold coins. Akbar was very impressed with the work and ordered it to be transcribed, illuminated and read out to him by Naqib Khan, his book reader. Faizi had so many copies made of *Nal Daman* that at the time of his death, there were still one hundred and one copies lying in his library. A Mughal official, Bayazid Bayat, variously in charge of the imperial kitchen, mint and mines dictated his memoirs (called *Tazkira i Humayun wa Akbar*) to a scribe and had nine copies of the manuscript made. One copy was sent to the imperial library, two were given to Abul Fazl for whom the work was written, and one was gifted to the Mughal princess, Gulbadan Begum. Three copies were also gifted to the three Mughal princes, Salim, Murad and Daniyal. Bayazid expected that more copies of his book would be later made by interested readers. Only one copy of Bayazid's *Tazkira* has, however, come to the notice of modern scholars.

Bibliophiles in Mughal India employed diverse methods to collect books. Balkrishan Brahman, an accountant of Shahjahan's reign from Hissar writes in an autobiographical note to his book, *Char Bahar*, that for five years he studied Persian poetry and prose during which time he collected many quality books, copied forty with his own pen and purchased a few. Books were gifted not only to kings but also to slaves. A rare

work of history of Bengal, *Baharistan i Ghaibi*, preserved in a single manuscript in the National Library of France, was given by the owner to his manumitted slave as a parting gift. The slave had not much interest in a fat book (the author of this essay spent a fortnight reading it in Paris) and sold it in Lahore to a protégé of the governor of Shajahanabad, to whom the book was originally gifted by the author, Alauddin Isfahani Shitab Khan Mirza Nathan 'Ghaibi'. The information about the circulation of the book is contained in fly leaf inscriptions of the manuscript.

The price of a book could go still higher if it were to be illuminated and illustrated. The Mughal atelier was famous for its galaxy of talented artists who could beautifully illustrate a scene described in the book. Such illustrations, also known as miniatures, mostly appeared on the opposite side of the written page. The Windsor Castle *Padshahnama* has a set of paintings illustrating key events, such as the expulsion of the Portuguese from Hugli and the marriage of Dara Shukoh. The Mughal school of painting flourished also because of the ideological position taken by Akbar



Weighing Ceremony (*Tuladan*) of Shahjahan. Windsor Castle *Padshahnama*

against Islamic prohibition against painting on its head. The theological position was that on the day of judgement God will ask the painter to breathe life in his creation and, since only God can give life, the painter would be tossed in hell. Akbar interpreted painting as an act of worship in which the painter realized his limitations as a human being. No matter how real the picture was, it could never come to life. The inventory of Akbar's estate, prepared soon after his death, included 24,000 books written by great scholars and adorned with extremely valuable bindings, valued at Rs. 6,468,781.

The Persian literary culture was an important component of India's rich and diverse heritage. The number of chronicles produced in Mughal India were more than the entire corpus of Iran and Central Asia combined. The chronicles were commissioned in a political context dominated by notions of powerful kingship and stable empire and composed with a literary flourish that became a genre in itself. The literary culture that flourished in Mughal India was propelled by a class that commanded power and resources, production and transmission of knowledge of different kinds, availability of suitable skills and techniques for writing and preparing manuscripts, and an intellectual environment in

which customs, ethics and aesthetics could be combined in various ways to suit the inclinations of an individual patron, scholar or litterateur.

After coins, manuscripts have survived more than any other artefact from Mughal India even though many have disappeared without a trace. With the decline of the Mughal empire, the books were exposed to the plundering raids of forces within and outside the country. Mughal manuscripts are housed in widely dispersed archives, libraries and private collections in India and abroad and are available for consultation to those interested in language, literature, history, religion and art.

Ibn Batuta and Chinese Porcelain from Delhi

Dr B.R. Mani

In a chance find during a clearance work by the Horticulture Branch of the Archaeological Survey of India in the grounds of Kotla Firoz Shah in Delhi, a large quantity of Chinese porcelain

was found in 1961-62¹. The pottery was initially thought to be of the Mughal period, but later examinations proved that they were undoubtedly imported Chinese blue and white porcelain and a





few celadon, which could be dated to the middle of the fourteenth century on stylistic grounds.

The contemporary literary evidence, as contained in the travelogue of Ibn Batuta², supports this, where it mentions the importance of Chinese porcelain in the court of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the Sultan of Delhi (1325-1351 CE). Muhammad bin Tughlaq was succeeded in 1351 by his nephew

Firoz Shah Tughlaq who ruled till 1388 and constructed his own citadel in the newly-founded fifth city of Delhi called Firozabad. He had his residence and seat of administration there, in the citadel known as Kotla Firoz Shah.

The Chinese blue and white porcelain belonging to the middle of the fourteenth century found at Kotla Firoz Shah is one of the largest collections

from a single site anywhere in the world outside China. Ellen S. Smart studied the chance find and recorded that the fragments were reassembled as far as possible, making 72 pieces – 44 blue and white dishes and plates, 23 blue and white bowls and 5 celadons³.

It has been observed by Smart⁴ on the evidence of the autobiographical document *Fatuhāt-i-Fīroz Shāhī* and also as per the account of *Tārīkh-i-Fīrozshāhī* that Fīroz Shāh Tughlaq became more conservative in the course of life and ordered

that all pictures and portraits on utensils and other articles should be removed from them and articles should be made only as approved and recognized by the Islamic law. This may be the reason for putting aside and deliberately breaking the dishes, plates and bowls found in the present hoard, which was buried in the ground. The evidence of their long use could be noticed in revetting and mending.

The porcelain pottery of the present hoard represents well-known shapes and, in type of





body and glaze, in painting and decoration they are comparable to those found in the Topkapu Serai and the shrine at Ardebil. One of the pieces of a bowl in the Delhi hoard bears a close similarity to 'precious things' in petal panels found at the bases of the David vases from the British Museum collection, which, on the basis of inscriptional evidence, are dated to 1351 CE.

Most of the Delhi plates have decorations of either lotus scroll type or petal panels type, but in two of them fungus scroll type decoration is also found. The unusual decoration on one of

the plates is that its underside is entirely blue, while the inside is standard blue on white⁵. John Carswell⁶ has published colour photographs of some fourteenth century blue and white porcelain from different collections belonging to the Yuan dynasty period and his illustration nos, 5, 19, 21, 24 and 46 closely resemble, in shape, size, execution and decorations, some of the porcelain from the Delhi hoard published here.

Carswell notes that 'on the dishes the most popular designs include dragon, phoenix(usually in pairs), pheasants(again often paired, one

swooping down on its partner perched on a parapet), qilin of leonine and equine types, white egrets stalking around a lotus pond, elaborate landscapes with rocky outcrops and stands of plantain, ferns and bamboo, morning glory, grapes, melons and other flowers and insects, and fish swimming through a background of swirling eelgrass [5, 19, 43,46]⁷. Such description

of fourteenth century blue and white pottery matches with the Delhi hoard.

In Delhi, a few tiny pieces of Chinese porcelain were also discovered in excavations conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India, Delhi Circle, under the direction of the author at Lal Kot⁸, the citadel of the city founded in the middle





of eleventh century CE. The site flourished till the end of the fourteenth century and the porcelain was found in the uppermost levels only, along with a few coins of Firoz Shah Tughlaq.

The glazed pottery and Chinese celadon had an earlier tradition in Delhi which were found in levels

datable to the thirteenth century. Local varieties of glazed ware have also been reported from the period of the Delhi Sultanate at Tughlaqabad, Adilabad, Kilokhari, Kot, Siri and Bijay Mandal in various archaeological investigations⁹. Some of them imitate the decorations of Chinese porcelain.

An interesting fact about the blue and white porcelain from Kotla Firoz Shah is that 53b pieces among them are inscribed by means of a series of holes drilled into the glaze or body on the undersides. They bear symbols and inscriptions in *naskh* characters and not in *nastalliq* as thought earlier¹⁰, mentioning 'the royal kitchen', which suggests that these items are from the royal kitchen of Kotla Firoz Shah. The catalogue of the hoard has been jointly prepared by the author and John Carswell and shall be published shortly.

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Chronicles of India

Jabez T. Sunderland's *India in Bondage*

Devika Sethi

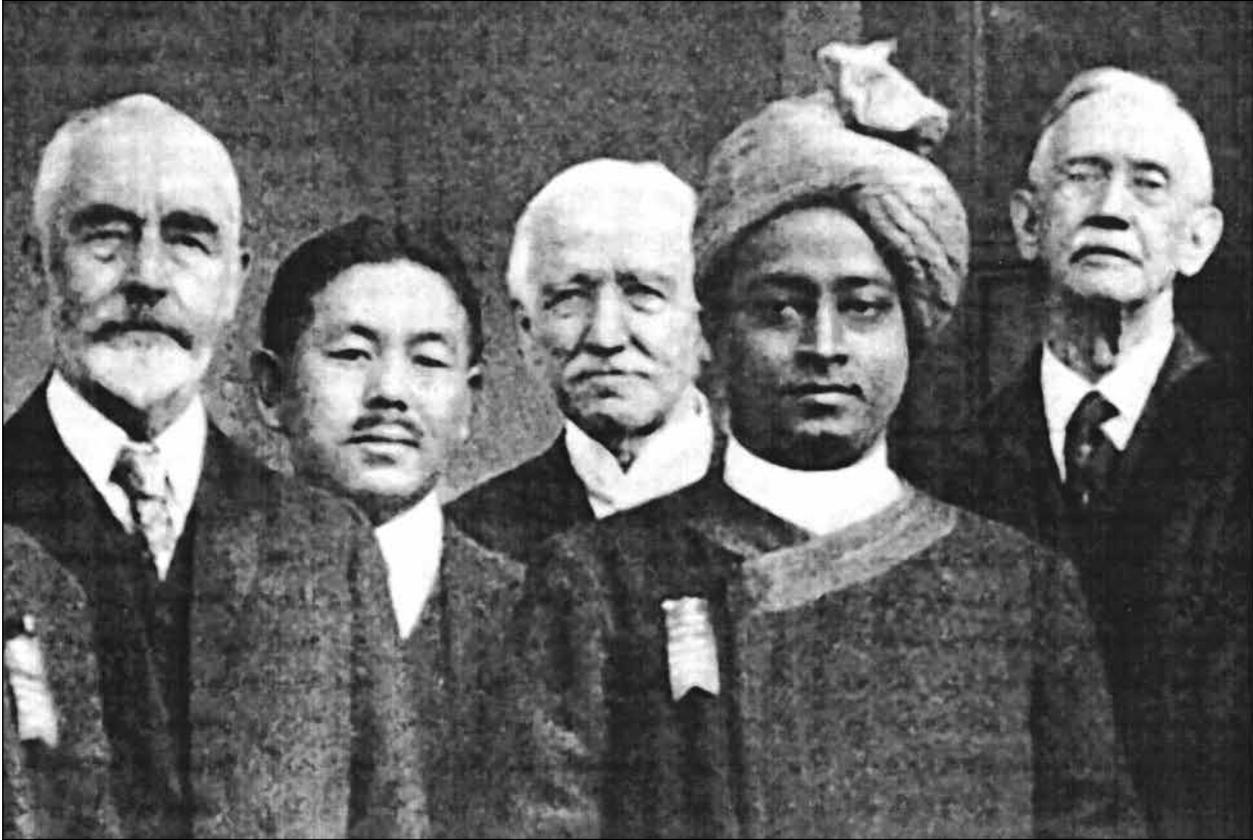
In a colonial context, and against the backdrop of an anti-colonial movement, it is all too easy to assume that only publications by Indian authors advocated independence from Britain or self-rule. However, non-Indian authors writing in English on matters concerning India, commanded



J T Sunderland

audiences in their home countries in addition to being read by an influential section of the Indian population. In fact, precisely because they escaped colonial stereotyping about 'seditious natives', non-Indian authors' words carried a greater illusion of neutrality, and sometimes more weight. Their criticism of the colonial state or excessive approbation of nationalist leaders could less easily be dismissed as biased than that by Indians. Yet, these chronicles of India, written at a time of great political turmoil in the first half of the twentieth century, have not received the attention they deserve. This article rescues one such chronicle from the mists of history.

Jabez Thomas Sunderland's *India in Bondage: Her Right to Freedom* was first published in India in December 1928. A second edition followed soon after, in May 1929. It contained over five hundred pages densely packed with information. Sunderland (1842-1936) was an American Unitarian minister, a Civil War veteran, a close associate of eminent nationalist Lala Lajpat Rai, and a keen India observer. Before writing his magnum opus, Sunderland had served as the President of the India Information Bureau of America, been a founder member of the India Independence League of America, and edited the journal *Young India* in New York. He was also the author of two other books on India: *India, America and World Brotherhood*, and *Causes of Famine*



JT Sunderland (3rd from left) with Paramhansa Yogananda

in India. His sister had served as a missionary in India, and it was to her that the book was dedicated. Sunderland felt he was well qualified to write a book on India. He had, he claimed, contemplated becoming a missionary to serve India while at the theological seminary and had been a 'constant student' of Indian religions for forty years. In 1895-96 and then again in 1913-14 he visited India with the aim of studying the conditions of Indians for himself. During these trips, he said, he had travelled more than 13,000 miles, given speeches in many important cities, and been to villages where 'no American before had been seen.' To round off his experience, he had also attended two sessions of the Indian National Congress. When he was away from India he followed events there closely by reading no less than seven newspapers, published at Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Poona, Lahore and Allahabad. In 1928, Jawaharlal Nehru (later to

become Independent India's first Prime Minister) referred to him as someone who had been 'a good friend of India for so many years that most of us who are not very old can hardly remember a time when he was not writing and speaking for India.' Among others, the famous American philosopher-historian Will Durant was a great admirer of Sunderland.

In 1927-28, before being published as a book, several chapters of *India in Bondage* had been serialized in the *Modern Review* of Calcutta, at that time considered one of the most influential Indian-owned English magazines. The book, after it was published in India, was banned by the Government of Bengal in August 1929, and the imported American edition was banned the next year. How does one write the biography of this remarkable chronicle of India? Sunderland's private papers, the Government

Lincoln that began it: “No nation is good enough to rule another nation”. The chapter titles—‘If other nations should be free, why not India?’, ‘British Arrogance and India’s Humiliation’, ‘India’s Drink curse: who are responsible?’ ‘Crushing out the genius of a great and gifted nation’, ‘Are the British fit to rule India?’, ‘The truth about the Amritsar Massacre’—provided clues as to what was to follow.

That the book was read and approved of by many prominent Indians was indicated by three testimonials that accompanied it: Lala Lajpat Rai wrote that he knew no other American who had given so much time and attention to an unbiased study of Indian problems; Nobel prize winner Rabindranath Tagore stated that he knew that author personally, and that he was a ‘knight errant on behalf of those who have been rendered defenceless’; nationalist leader and educationist M.A. Ansari praised the work



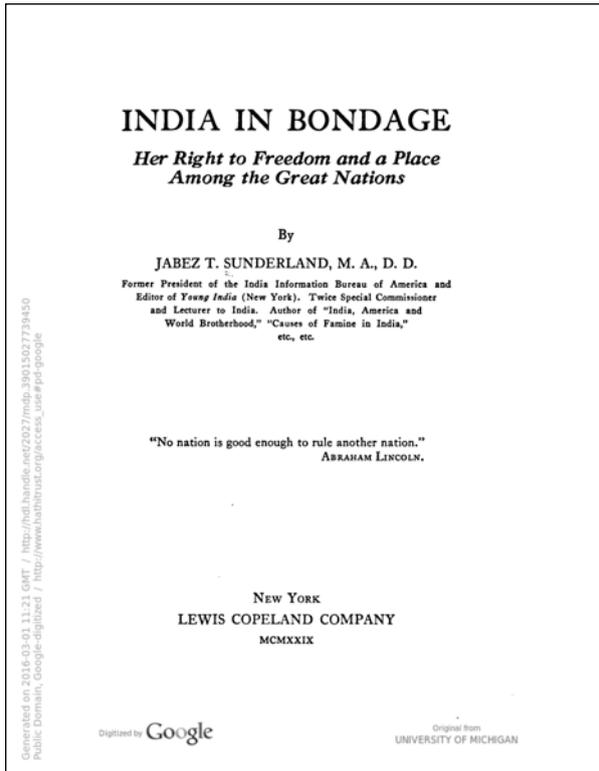
Modern Review

for its comprehensive outlook, and deemed it an excellent book for Europeans and Americans who wanted to know about India.

Sunderland was an ardent enthusiast of Indian civilization, called it the ‘oldest nation in the world’, and emphasizing that a ‘large number of people were Aryans, the same as Greeks, Romans, Germans, English and Americans’. Sunderland tried to insure his book against censorship—unsuccessfully, as we shall see—by clarifying that his criticism of British policy, no matter how severe, was not meant to be an affront to the British nation, just as pleas for abolition of slavery did not mean enmity to the American nation. He likened his role in writing the book to that of a surgeon who ‘probes a wound with a view to its cure.’ The colonial state in India evidently did not welcome the medical intervention.

Sunderland made an impassioned plea to Britain to grant Dominion Status to India. Pre-empting even the official Congress policy by a year, he suggested that India should either become ‘an absolutely independent nation with no connection with Great Britain’, or else remain in the empire but be given a place of a ‘real partner.’ A running theme through the book was that colonial rule was based on hypocritical deception and irresponsible power: ‘Is Justice one thing in England and Canada and another thing in India?’ thundered Sunderland. He urged visitors to India to look at closely at the material foundations of the railways, post and telegraph and law courts—all of which were paid for by Indian money. He drew their attention to terrible famines. For these he blamed heavy taxation: Indians were, in his view, taxed twice as heavily as Englishmen and three times as much as Scotsmen.

Sunderland also referred to the sensitive matter of the criticism of British colonial policies by Americans, and justified it on the ground that the ‘observations by nations of other nations, if made in the right spirit, are among the most



American Edition of India in Bondage 1



American Edition of India in Bondage 2

valuable things in the world'. To prove the range of American support for greater Indian self-rule, Sunderland marshalled quotations from the speeches and writings of a number of prominent Americans: industrialist Andrew Carnegie, the US Commissioner for Education, senators, diplomats, and academics. Furthermore, he urged other Americans to lend support to the Indian cause. If they did not do so, this could only mean that they were either ignorant of the facts, or were 'unworthy of the freedom which we ourselves enjoy.' Sunderland also argued that colonialism negatively impacted colonizers. In his view:

The evil spirit of arrogance, domination, pride of class, indifference to the rights of others, imperialism which the men who have gone to India and have spent half their lives in autocratic rule there have instinctively imbibed there, has been brought back by them to England, on their return from their place of autocratic rule abroad, to poison

the ideas and the political and social life of England.

Elaborating further on the theme, he took recourse to a historical example: after four centuries of Rome's rule, Britain was left only with old pottery, some paved roads and a few towns with Roman names!

Although *India in Bondage* was accorded a warm reception by readers in India, prompting the publication of its second edition in 1929, the Bengal Government took a different view of its contents. In the same year the printer and publisher (eminent Bengali intellectual Ramananda Chatterjee) were both arrested on charges of publishing a seditious book. During the trial in the court of the Chief Presidency Magistrate, the defence counsel took the plea that the book simply reiterated a plea for self-

government that had been made many times by the Indian National Congress. Sunderland's intention in writing the book had not been to 'excite hatred' against the Government, but merely to urge reforms in the political arrangements in the country. Interestingly, the prosecution was handled by an Indian too: the Advocate General of Bengal, Sir N.N. Sircar, who argued that 'at the present moment sedition was both fashionable and sometimes profitable'. Ultimately, *India in Bondage* was banned and the appeal of the printer in the Calcutta High Court was dismissed.

This linear narrative of the successful prosecution of the printer and publisher of *India in Bondage* disguises official hand-wringing and doubts over the best course of action. Several senior British officials of the Government of India read the book before it was banned and offered their opinion on it. The Director of Public Information, J. Coatman, for instance, reviewed the book thus:

Statements of the kind contained in the book are not unknown in some sections of the Indian Press, but nowhere have they been collected together in the venomous form and manner in which Dr. Sunderland has presented them. Even more than the collection of the material, the arrangement, the mode of expression and the skill with which the author has employed exaggeration and understatement... render "India in Bondage" a source of no small danger. [...] I do feel very strongly that it attempts to paint a picture which is sure to have a most undesirable influence on the average Indian reader and more specially on young impressionable minds. It is impossible to look with equanimity on the possible results of such influence when the political atmosphere in India is already highly charged.

Even as the trial was going on, a number of questions regarding the book were raised in the British parliament: one British MP wanted to

know why—when the first edition of the book was published in December 1928 and sold out and the second edition was published in May 1929—Ramananda Chatterjee was arrested a year after the book was first published. Another MP wanted to know if something could be done to stop prosecutions of this sort in India.

India in Bondage was also published in the United States in October 1929. Getting a book published in many countries was no easy task at the best of times, and became even more challenging when the work was banned in one country. Before *India in Bondage* was banned in India, Sunderland had found it difficult to get the book a publisher in the United States. After they declined to publish the book, Sunderland wrote to Macmillan & Co. in New York in 1929, urging them to reconsider. He even offered to change the title to 'The Tragedy of India'. He informed them that the book had been published in India four months ago, its sales there were large, and that it had received a 'warm reception from the principal Indian leaders.' In support for his book, he cited that it was 'exactly in line with the thought and aims of both Tagore and Gandhi' (books by and about whom were published by Macmillan), and had received their endorsement, as well as that of the British educationist and friend of India, C.F. Andrews. In his own opinion, his book was valuable because it was timely (as it was ready for publication on the verge of the report of the Simon Commission). Although Sunderland could not convince Macmillan, another New York firm—Lewis Copeland—agreed to publish the book. By the time *India in Bondage* was published in the United States in October 1929, it had already been banned in India.

India in Bondage had its fair share of both admirers and critics. In July 1930 Edward Thompson, at this time a lecturer in Bengali at Oxford, wrote a series of articles in *The Times* (London) to correct

the 'mass of misapprehension that underlies American thought about India'. In the third and last article of the series, he undertook a detailed appraisal of *India in Bondage*, and criticized Sunderland for his 'false assumptions', 'reckless partiality' and 'sweeping style', and pointed out errors of fact. In a section titled 'Censorship and Sales', Thompson argued that the banning of the book by the Government of India had proved to be lucky for the author, and gave him the advertisement he needed. Thompson's criticism of Sunderland's work as well as that of other Americans on India snowballed into a war of words that played out on the pages of *The Times* for many months. A few months later, Sunderland provided a rejoinder to the charges leveled against him. He clarified that his book was not hostile to the British government or individual Englishmen in India, but merely opposed to a specific policy. He also found the five errors of fact pointed out by Thompson as 'absolutely trifling', emphasized his own extensive experience of India, and mentioned that the manuscript had been read by five scholars (including three Indians, 'A Hindu, a Mohamedan, and a Christian'; a scholar in Germany and one in America). None of the extensive reviews in the Indian periodical press thought the book riddled with errors. Thompson in turn accused Sunderland, and through him American liberal opinion, of wrecking the settlement that the British and Indians were trying to devise. That books were earlier accused of fomenting violence against the state, and now of wrecking settlements between the colonizers and the colonized, is emblematic of changes in the relationship of Indian nationalists with the colonial state in the late 1920s, against the backdrop of an assertive Indian national movement.

India in Bondage did indeed become more popular in India in the aftermath of the controversy surrounding its ban. Before the book was banned, the publisher had admitted that it was not easy

The Case for India

by *William J. Durant*

Simon & Schuster

Will Durant's *The Case for India*

to get reviewers or endorsements for it in India, and attributed this to professional rivalry. After the ban, however, its popularity increased by leaps and bounds. By the Government of India's own admission, initiation of proceedings against the publisher had increased sales of the book. According to one report, 200 copies of the book were sold in one place in Bengal alone within three weeks of the institution of prosecution. *India in Bondage* proved to be popular even outside India. In November 1929, when orders for the book were coming from Germany and England, the publisher had no copies left to send.

The legacy of *India in Bondage* was felt in many spheres. It inspired the world-renowned historian Will Durant to write *The Case for India*, in which he not only quoted Sunderland substantially,



Indian Opinion

but also termed his most famous book 'so good that its circulation is prohibited by the British Government in India'. The Government of India responded by detaining copies of Durant's book when they reached India on the grounds that it contained 'substantial reproductions from another banned book'. *India in Bondage* also became a prop for expressing resistance against the colonial state. In June 1930, during the Civil Disobedience Movement, the President of the Coimbatore Town Congress Committee read extracts from the banned book at a public meeting, despite being warned by the police, who later confiscated the book from him. The ban on *India in Bondage* ensured that Sunderland was forever referred to as its author, including in advertisements for his other books.

Ten years after its publication, *India in Bondage* was still being discussed. Around this time, the

Government of India had lifted bans on books by Subhash Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi and M.N. Roy, and the question arose of whether or not to 'unban' Sunderland's book. After reading it, a senior Government of India official, C.J.W. Lillie, opined:

It is the most unfair history of the British connection with India that I have seen, and it would, I think, be difficult to find a book in which charges of unscrupulousness, exploitation, oppression, and deliberate impoverishment of India are so long sustained. There is practically no relieving feature. [...] though there are many books in respect of which the ban could safely be removed, this book would be among the last.

Once the Government of India established that *India* was as dangerous in 1939 as it had been in 1929, Home Member Sir Reginald Maxwell stated in the Legislative Assembly that *India in Bondage* would continue to remain banned, since the 'whole effect of the book [...] is likely to encourage violence on the part of impressionable people.'

The legacy of *India in Bondage* and *The Case for India* was no less powerful during the Second World War, when non-Indians who wrote critiques of British rule in India were hailed by Indians as holding a 'wholly impartial view'. To cite one example, in December 1942, Manilal Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi's son and the editor of the South Africa based journal *Indian Opinion*) reproduced extracts from Will Durant's *The Case for India* in a special issue, and explained why he had chosen this work:

Any literature that would enlighten the world with the truth about India, written by however high an authority, is studiously kept away from the world. Such literature is banned in India so as to keep the masses ignorant. The only literature that is allowed the widest possible circulation is that which speaks against India, exposes only her dark

side and discredits her in the eyes of the world and tries to justify the continuance of British rule in that country – such as, for instance, Miss Mayo’s “Mother India.” [...] It is, therefore, necessary to put before the world the true facts. It is desirable also that a wholly impartial view is placed before it so as to gain its effective sympathy. Anything written by an Indian would, no doubt, be taken as tainted with partiality and as being wholly one-sided. Not so when the writer is an Englishman of high standing.

Exactly a week later, another special issue of *Indian Opinion* carried one (and only the one) article titled ‘Why America and Other Nations Should Sympathise with India’s Struggle for Freedom’. After a brief editorial note, the issue reproduced a chapter from *India in Bondage*, the editor calling the book ‘the most authoritative and most impartially written book on India containing unchallengeable facts’. He added: ‘Needless to say the book is banned in India by

the British authorities.’ Being banned by a colonial government was, for an author and his book, not a matter of shame, but a badge of honour.

Jabez T. Sunderland’s life and his chronicle of India are an exemplar of human values and empathy triumphing over boundaries of race and nationality. Although he was neither the first nor the last American to advocate the cause of Indian independence, he was an influential and persuasive votary of the cause. His travels in India, his deep friendships with Indians at the forefront of their struggle for political freedom, and his extensive knowledge of the issues that he commented upon gave his opinion a weight that other chroniclers lacked. The colonial state’s attempt to silence his voice only made him more popular than ever. *India in Bondage* appealed to the conscience of freedom loving Americans and Britons, and its rich legacy is testament to the power of words to shape public opinion, and therefore also the course of history.

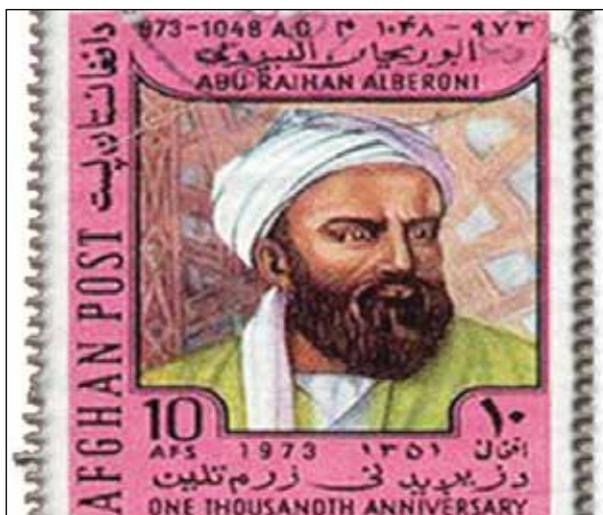
India as Described by Al-Biruni

Dr Vinay Kumar Gupta

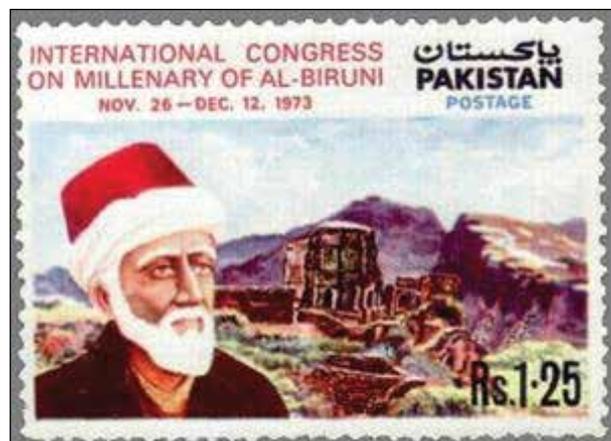
Ancient Indian literary sources mostly are religious or literary in nature and there is a general lack of written works for the acquaintance of Indian history in a proper chronological framework. There are only a few works available which can be considered to be of historical importance and leaving aside Kautilya's *Arthashastra* for its subject matter and Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, these chronological works generally are the contributions of non-Indians who either visited India or got information from some sources after coming in contact with people. Such records start with Megasthenes in Mauryan times (late 4th century BCE) followed by other Greek authors in subsequent centuries, Chinese pilgrims Faxian (4th century ACE) and Xuanzang (7th century ACE) followed by medieval Islamic

writers. The accounts of Chinese pilgrims were written more from a religious point of view, so, sometimes do not offer proper historical perspective but with the work of Al-Biruni, a radical change is observed in Indological studies.

Abu Raihan Muhammad ibn Ahmad, popularly known as Al-Biruni (or Al-Beruni) was one of the greatest scholars of the medieval Islamic world. He was born at Kath (in modern day Uzbekistan), then part of Khwarizmian Persia under the Samanid Empire in 973 ACE and died in 1048 ACE at Ghazni (in modern Afghanistan) under the Ghaznavid Empire. It is believed that he was born outside the town (Persian *Birun*) or else his family was considered an outsider in the town. That's why he is known as Al-Biruni. Now, a town in Uzbekistan is named after him as Biruni. He had a great knowledge of mathematics, physics,



Al-Biruni



Al-Biruni on a Pakistan Stamp

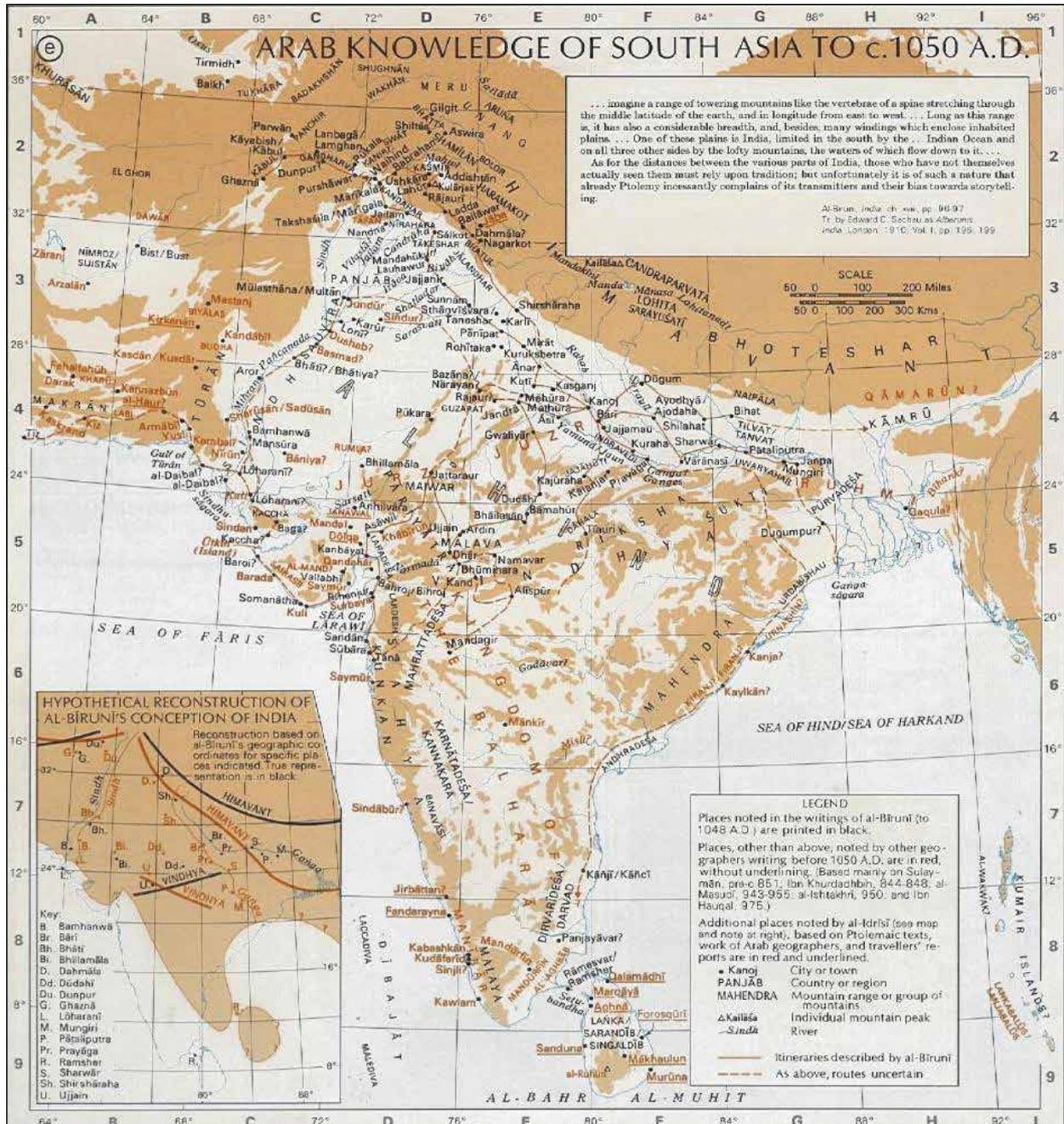
astronomy, medicine, natural science, astrology, earth science, history and philosophy. He was conversant in many languages; that include Arabic, Persian, Khwarezmian, Sanskrit and he also knew Hebrew, Syriac and probably Greek, to name a few. He is credited with hairaq written over a hundred books (according to Kennedy the number stands at 146) of which most of the works are unavailable. His book entitled *Kitab fi Tahqiq mali'l Hind min Maqala Maqbola fil' Aql ao Mardhula*, popularly known as *Kitabu'l Hind* or *Tarikh Al-Hind* is one of the most illustrious accounts of India by a non-Indian. This book was made available to the readers worldwide by Edward C. Sachau who first translated it into German and then to English, in the last quarter of nineteenth century.

Al-Biruni considers himself free of prejudices while giving the account of India but at times it is observed that he was too proud of his Khwarezmian Islamic origin and viewed Indian practices with disgrace as is clear from his usage of words haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited and stolid for the Hindus in general terms. These were not exclusive to Indians but were used for Greek practices of which he thought as lowly. Also, various Arab practices prior to the rise of Islam in Arabia have been so desired. He blasts the Arabs by telling that they cohabited with menstruating and pregnant women; several men agreed to cohabit with the same woman in the same period of menstruation etc.. He also refrained himself from going into details of Mahmud's exploits in India and the great devastation he caused on Indian territory. It is only from his compatriot Al-Utbi's accounts that the details of havoc caused by Mahmud's army at Somanath, Mathura, Kannauj and Nagarkot are known. In spite of these shortcomings, Al-Biruni's account is an invaluable source of information of India, particularly of the medieval period. Al-Biruni got the opportunity to read various Sanskrit texts and discuss various issues with learned Indians, through which he could develop his knowledge of India. It seems that he

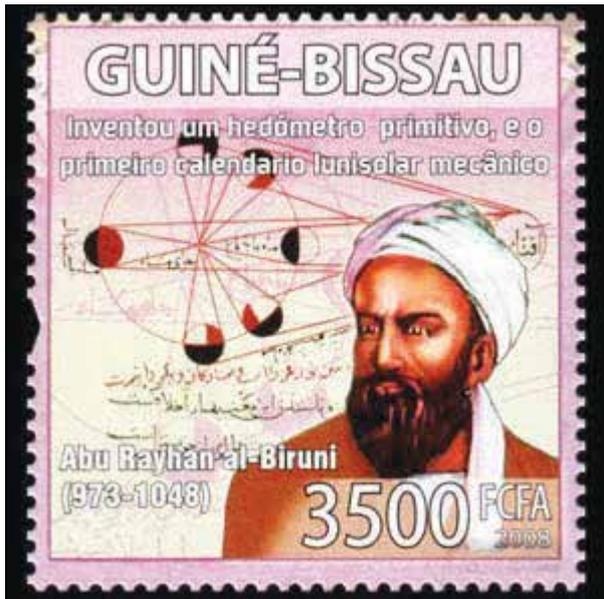
did not visit India proper except for those parts which were annexed into the Ghaznavid empire (territory of modern Pakistan). This is clear from his account of various festivities of India which appear somewhat different from those which are practised in northern India. This becomes further clear when he talks of special days of veneration and mentions *bihku* or *shibu* for *samkranti*. In fact, he would have heard of it from someone from Assam as Bihu is the most popular festival there. Otherwise he would have mentioned Makara samkranti, an important festival of northern India.

Doubts are sometimes raised about the concept of India as a nation prior to the British occupation and Al-Biruni provides a definite information on this issue. He mentions various parts of India as different states and regions but is categorical about the boundaries of the country of India. He informs that the mountain Kularjak near Kashmir and mountains Unang from where the river Sindh originates (at that time the region was under the Turks), form the northern frontier of India. This may refer to the Karakoram range in the Himalayas and area to its east. In the western frontier mountains of India there lived various tribes of Afghans and extended up to the neighbourhood of the Sindh valley. This would mean the area on the Af-Pak border on the upper side and the area up to Seistan on the lower side, as the western frontiers of India. He further informs that the southern border of India is formed by the ocean and the coast of India begins with Tiz, the capital of Makran. He does not specify the eastern frontier of India but elsewhere he mentions Vanga, Pragjyotisha and Lohita (Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, respectively) as part of India. While talking about Sarandib (Ceylon), he also mentions Rameshwaram and Setubandha. For the latter, he mentions that it is the dike of Rama, the son of Dasaratha which he built from the continent to the castle Lanka.

Al-Biruni also informs that in former times, Khurasan, Persis, Iraq, Mosul, the country up to the frontier of Syria was Buddhist, but



Al-Biruni's India



Al-Biruni Astro

then Zarathustra went forth from Adharbaijan and preached Magism in Balkh (Bactria). In consequence, the Buddhists were banished from those countries, and had to emigrate to the countries east of Balkh. About the belief of the Hindus in God, Al-Biruni informs that the belief of educated and uneducated people differs in every nation; for the former strive to conceive abstract ideas and to define general principles, whilst the latter do not pass beyond the apprehension of the senses, and are content with derived rules. The Hindus believe with regard to God that He is one, eternal, without beginning and end, acting by free will, almighty, all-wise, living, giving life, ruling, preserving; one who in his sovereignty is unique, beyond all likeness and unlikeness. Some Hindu scholar calls God a *point*, meaning to say thereby that the qualities of bodies do not apply to him. Al-Biruni criticizes the uneducated man who read this and imagines, God is as small as a *point*.

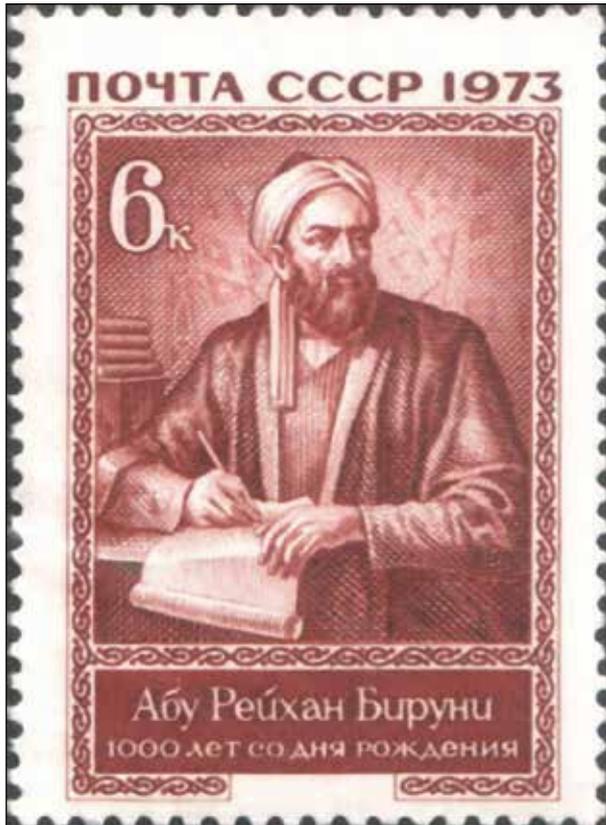
Al-Biruni explains the meaning of the word "Sufi" as being derived from the Greek word '*suf*' meaning wisdom and talks of the ignorance of some people who could not understand its meaning when the word philosopher (i.e. loving

wisdom) was adopted in Islam. These people take the word Sufi to be identical with the so-called '*Ahl-assufa*' among the companions of Muhammad. In later times the word was corrupted by misspelling, so that finally it was taken for a derivation from '*suf*', i.e. the wool of goats. Abu-alfath Albusti made a laudable effort to solve the problem by claiming the derivation of word '*sufi*' from '*safi*' i.e. pure. The doctrine of Patanjali is akin to that of the Sufi regarding being occupied in meditation on the Truth (i.e. God), for they say, "as long as you point to something, you are not a monist; but when the Truth seizes upon the object of your pointing and annihilates it, then there is no longer an indicating person nor an object indicated."

Al-Biruni mentions four *varnas* (castes) among the Hindus which are Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. After the Sudra follow the people called *Antyaja*, who have eight classes of them: fuller, shoemaker, juggler, the basket and shield maker, the sailor, fisherman, the hunter of wild animals and of birds and the weaver. The four castes do not live together with them in one and the same place. These eight guilds live near the villages and towns of the four castes, but outside them. The people called Hadi, Doma, Candala and Badhatau are not reckoned amongst any caste or guild. They are occupied with dirty work, like the cleansing of the villages and other services.



Al-Biruni Timbre



Al-Biruni Russian

Hindus differ among themselves as to which of these castes is capable of attaining to liberation. According to the Hindu philosophers, liberation is common to all castes and to the whole human race, if their intention of obtaining it is perfect. This view is based on the saying of Vyasa: "Learn to know the twenty-five things thoroughly. Then you may follow whatever religion you like; you will no doubt be liberated."

On the issue of the beginning of idol-worship, Al-Biruni opines that the popular mind leans towards the sensible world, and has an aversion to the world of abstract thought which is only understood by highly educated people, of whom in every time and every place there are very few. For those who march on the path to liberation, or those who study philosophy and theology, and who desire abstract truth, are entirely free from worshipping anything but God alone and

would never dream of worshipping an image manufactured to represent him. He talks about the famous wooden idol of the Sun God at Multan and its desecration by Muhammad Ibn Alkasim. The idol was the cause of the prosperity of the town for there came pilgrims from all sides to visit it. A mosque was built on the site of the temple and later on Jalam Ibn Shaiban broke the idol into pieces and killed its priests. He also talks about the famous bronze idol of Lord Cakrasvamin at Kurukshetra (Thanesar), nearly the size of a man. This was desecrated by Mahmud and taken to the hippodrome in Ghazni, together with the idol of Somanath. In inner Kashmir, there is a wooden idol called Sarada, which is much venerated and frequented by pilgrims. Al-Biruni shows his hatred for idol worshippers saying, "When the heathen Arabs had imported into their country idols from Syria, they also worshipped them, hoping that they would intercede for them with God."

Al-Biruni gives a list of eighteen Puranas and twenty Smritis. The interesting fact is that the list of Puranas includes names of *Brahmavaivarta* and *Varaha Purana* which are generally considered later composition. *Brahmavaivarta* in particular is believed to have been written by Rupa Gosvami in the sixteenth century by scholars. Al-Biruni's account makes it difficult to agree with such a postulation. Al-Biruni also gives details of the epic *Mahabharata* which he mentions as *Bharata* having 1,00,000 *slokas* divided in eighteen parts (*parvas*). He elsewhere has elaborated the life of Vasudeva and the war of Bharata. About the handbooks of mathematical astronomy, he mentions five Siddhantas and these are: *Surya-siddhanta*, composed by Lata; *Vasishtha-siddhanta*, composed by Vishnucandra; *Pulisa-siddhanta*, composed by Pulisa (Paulisa, the Greek); *Romaka-siddhanta*, composed by Srishena and *Brahma-siddhanta*, composed by Brahmagupta. He further informs that the authors of these books drew from one and the same source, the book *Paithamaha*. Al-Biruni also talks of *Panca-siddhantika*, composed by Varahamihira, but not in great esteem. He also

mentions two famous *Tantras* by Aryabhatta and Balabhadra, besides the *Rasayana-tantra* by Bhanuyasas. Sugriva, the Buddhist, had composed an astronomical handbook which he called *Dadhi-sagara* and *Lavana-mushti* and a pupil of his composed *Kura-babaya*. Thereafter, Brahmagupta composed *Khanda-khadyaka*. Few of these books are not known from any other source, so the information provided by Al-Biruni is significant. He also informs of Caraka's book on medicine which according to him was already translated into Arabic. The book of *Pancatantra* was known among them as the book of Kalila and Dimna. Al-Biruni also provides an insight into the Hindu metrology, the measures of measurement and weighing. According to him, 1 *mana* is equal to 180 *dirham*.

Al-Biruni is a very important source as far as the ancient Indian writing system is concerned. He informs that the Hindus had lost the knowledge of writing and alphabets but Vyasa, the son of Parasara, rediscover their alphabet of fifty letters by an inspiration from God. He informs that in the past Greeks and Muslims used to write on animal hides but not the Hindus. The *kirtas* made out in Egypt of papyrus stalk was also an important material for writing in the Islamic world before the discovery of paper by the Chinese. The paper reached the Islamic world from China through Chinese prisoners in Samarkand who introduced the fabrication of paper. The writing material for Hindus used to be *tala* (palm) leaves in south India whereas in central and northern India, the bark of the *tuz* tree (*bhurja*) was used for writing. He also details the process of making books from these writing material. For scripts, he informs that *Siddhamatrika* which originated in Kashmir, was popular in Kashmir and also Varanasi, two high schools of Hindu sciences. In the middle country (Aryavarta) around Kanauj, the same writing was used. In Malava, the script used was *Nagara*, *Ardhanagari* in Bhatiya and Sindh, *Malwari* in Malwashau (southern Sindh), *Saindhava* in Bahmanwa or Almansura (near Karachi), *Karnata* in Karnatadesa, *Andhri* in Andhradesa, *Dravidi* in Dravidadesa, *Lari* in Laradesa, *Gaudi*

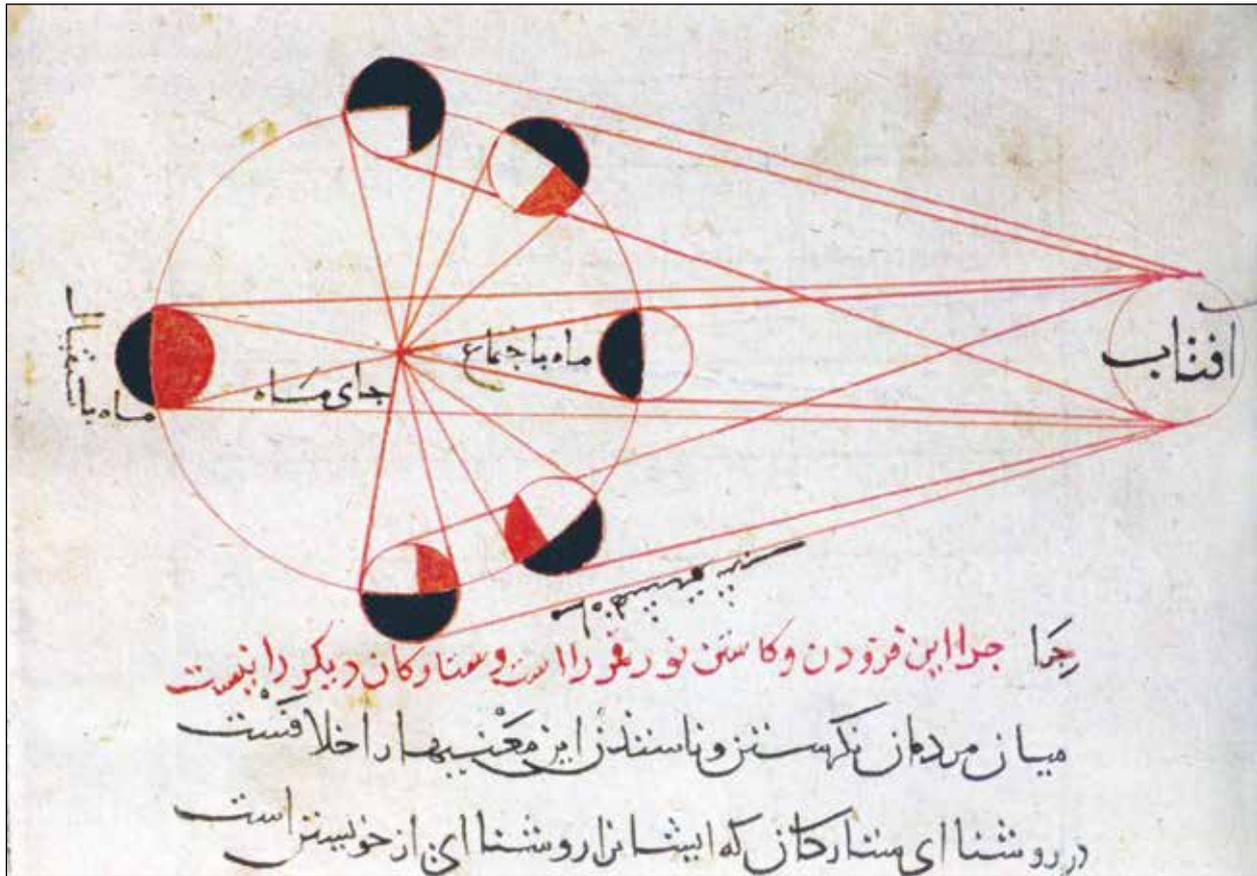
in Purvadesa (Bengal), *Bhaikshuki* in Udunpur in Purvadesa which is the writing of Buddha (i.e. Buddhist monasteries like Oddantapuri and Vikramasila). He also informs about the eighteen orders of numbers starting from *ekam* (1) to *parardha* (1,00,000,000,000,000) and that the numeral signs which Muslims use are derived from the finest forms of Hindu signs. As per him, no nation including the Arabs went beyond the thousand heembea except the Hindus. He also calculates the length of nychthemeron of Brahman at 3,110,400,000,000 of our years and nychthemeron of Purusha at 622,080,000,000, 000 of our years. The month of *Kha* has 9,497,498,700,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 civil days. He calculates one day of Siva at 37,264,147,126,589,458,187,550,720,000,000, 000,000,000,000,000,000,000 *kalpas*. Undoubtedly, Hindu arithmetic was at such a high pedestal at that time and Al-Biruni was a master of all these sciences. Similarly he writes about the division of the nychthemeron into minor particles of time. A day is divided into *Ghati*, *Nadi*; *Kshana*; *Cashaka*, *Vinadi*; *Kala*; *Prana*; *Nimesha*; *Lava*; *Truti* and *Anu* in decreasing order. *Anu* is the smallest unit of time and he calculates one day as having 88,473,600 *Anus*. Hindus call the hour *hora*. Quoting Yakub Ibn Tarik, he informs of four kinds of measures (*mana*) which are: *Saura-mana*, *Savana-mana*, *Chandra-mana* and *Nakshatra-mana*.

Al-Biruni gives an interesting account of a Hindu science similar to alchemy which was called *Rasayana*. It means an art which is restricted to certain operations, drugs, and compound medicines, most of which are taken from plants. Its principles restore the health of those who are ill beyond hope, and give back youth to fading old age, so that people become again what they were in the age near puberty; white hair becomes black again, the keenness of the senses is restored as well as the capacity for juvenile agility, and even for cohabitation, and the life of people in this world is even extended to a long period. A famous representative of this art was Nagarjuna, a native

of fort Daihak, near Somanath. He excelled in it and composed a book on the subject.

An important contribution of Al-Biruni is his information on various places and the distances between them. A number of these places still need to be identified. He has given the measurement of distance in *farsakh*, a Persian unit of measurement. He informs that by that time, the capital of Madhyadesa was transferred from Kanauj to Bari in the east. He provides significant information about the locations of Prayaga and Pataliputra which leaves no scope for consideration of Prayag with Pataliputra as argued by some scholars. He informs that the opposite Tilwat to the left is the realm of Naipal (Nepal). From Nepal is reached Bhoteshar which is the first frontier of Tibet. He gives a description

of places as far south as Sri Lanka and provides a list of Indian rivers along with their sources, mountains etc. An important point to be noted here is the one which relates to river Sarsati (Sarasvati) as Al-Biruni tells that this river falls into the sea at the distance of a bowshot east of Somanath. This statement confirms the view of archaeologists that in the past the river Sarasvati used to flow through Rajasthan somewhat parallel to the Sindhu and fell into the sea near Kachchha. Al-Biruni also talks of an animal called *sharava* in the Konkan region which has four feet, but also on the back it had something like four feet directed upwards. It had a small proboscis, but two big horns with which it attacked the elephant and cleaved it in two. Another unique animal which he mentions is from the rivers of Southern India called by various names as *graha*, *jaltantu* and *tandua*. It is thin, but very long.



An illustration from Al-Biruni's astronomical works explains the different phases of the moon (Source: Wikipedia)

He mentions a number of eras which were used in Hindu writings. Some of these are: the era of the beginning of the existence of Brahman; the beginning of present *kalpa*; the beginning of the seventh *manvantara* in which we are now; the beginning of the twenty-eighth *caturyuga*, in which we are now; the beginning of the fourth *caturyuga*, i.e. the present Kaliyuga; Pandavakala; the era of Kalayavana. He calculates the conjectural date of Rama on the basis of the Vishnudharmottara Purana at 18,148,132 years before the gauge-year (when Al-Biruni composed his work). The eras which he mentions as being in vogue at that time are: Sri Harsha, Vikramaditya, Saka, Valabha and Gupta. His information on Indian eras is quite valuable and sometimes helps in solving various issues of dating. About the Sakakala (Saka samvat) he tells that it falls 135 years later than that of Vikramaditya (Vikram samvat). He further informs that the year of destruction of Somanath by Mahmud is 416 Hijra, or 947 Sakakala. That clearly places the beginning of the Saka samvat in 78/79 ACE. This issue of the beginning of the Saka samvat is one of ongoing debates in the academic world and Al-Biruni's information can put the debate to rest. Al-Biruni also gives the list of Hindushahi rulers and the extinction of this dynasty at the hands of Mahmud.

About the duties of the Brahmanas, Al-Biruni gives an account. Quoting *Vishnu Purana*, he informs that the life of a Brahmana is divided into four periods which are according to the *asrama* system. The fourth period starts from the age of 76 and lasts till the end of life. The universal duties of the Brahmana throughout his whole life are works of piety, giving alms and receiving them. He must continually read, perform the sacrifices, take care of the fire which he lights, offer before it, worship it, and preserve it from being extinguished, that he may be burned by it after his death. It is called *homa*. A Brahmana is obliged to dwell between the river Sindh in the north and river Carmanvati (Chambal) in the

south. He is not allowed to cross either of these frontiers so as to enter the country of the Turks or of the Karnata. About few important places of pilgrimage he informs that Mount Meru is such a place and in its vicinity there are pilgrim sites. From the mountain Nishadha comes the river Sarasvati and Gandharvi. From mountain Kailasa comes the river Mandakini. There are other mountains near the Kailasa which include Candraparvata, Lohita, Sarayusati, Aruna, Gaura from where comes rivers Acud, Lohitanadi, Sarayu and Sailoda. In Multan and Thanesar there are ponds in which Hindus worship by washing themselves. Among the important pilgrimage cities, he makes mention of Varanasi, Kurukshetra (Thanesar), Mathura, Multan and Kashmir.

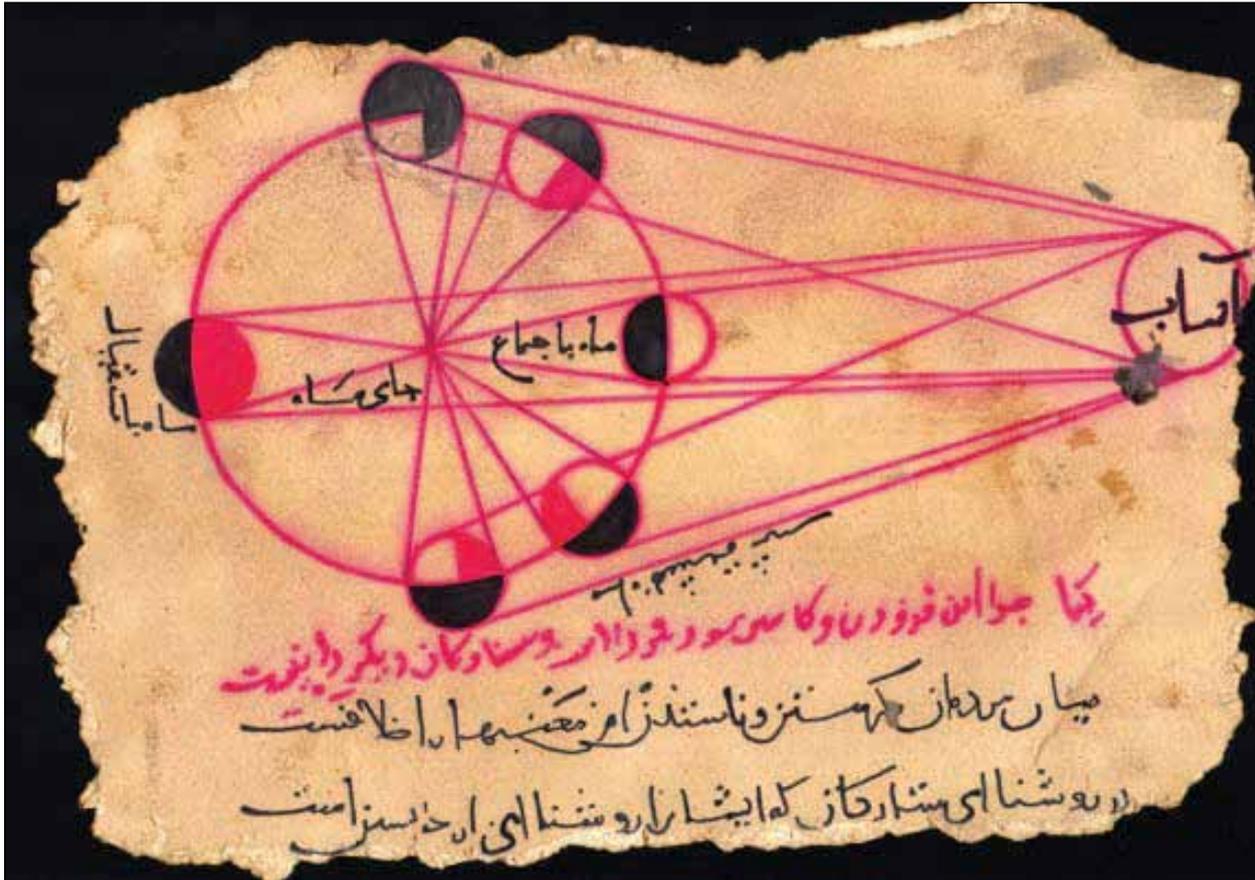
An idea of the condition of females is also achieved from the accounts of Al-Biruni. At one place he informs that Hindus discuss all matters with the ladies of the house. That would mean the advice of females was respected and they enjoyed certain rights. About the right of inheritance of women, he quotes Manu saying that a daughter inherited a fourth part of the share of a son. In case of a widow who does not commit *sati* (suicide), the heir of her deceased husband has to provide her with nourishment and clothing as long as she lives.

Al-Biruni also informs of some pious duties of the Hindus when he tells that it is obligatory with them every day to give alms as much as possible. They do not let money become a year or even a month old, for this would be a draft on an unknown future, of which a man does not know whether he reaches it or not. One-ninth of the total income after deduction of taxes was destined for alms. About the eating habits of the Hindus, he informs that killing in general was forbidden to them. Killing of certain animals like sheep, goats, gazelles, hares etc. was allowed by means of strangulation only. He also mentions

that eating of cows was not allowed, at least from the time of the Bharata war. He offers his insight in this matter by offering the explanation that it is so because of economical reasons, as cows were the animals that served man in travelling by carrying his loads, in agriculture in the works of ploughing and sowing, in the household by the milk and the products made thereof. Further, man makes use of its dung, and in wintertime even of its breath. Therefore it was forbidden to eat cow's meat, as also Alhjjaj forbade it, when people complained to him that Babylonia became more and more desert. About the beliefs of the Hindus regarding marriage he informs that according to their marriage law it is better to marry a stranger than a relative. It is absolutely forbidden to marry related women both of direct descending and ascending line. It is also forbidden

to marry collateral relation, viz. a sister, a niece, a maternal or paternal aunt and their daughters. He also informs of the custom of a widows burning themselves, particularly the wives of the kings to prevent any chances of committing something unworthy of the illustrious husband. An exception is made only for women of advanced age and for those who have children. He also informs that a child belongs to the caste of the mother, not to that of the father. This information may help in solving the debatable issues of various dynasties in regard to their castes.

The justice system of the time was based on moral values and religious beliefs. An adulteress is driven out of the house of the husband and banished. The law of theft directs that the punishment of the thief should be in accordance



Hand drawn vintage science picture

with the value of the stolen object. About the disposal of dead bodies, he informs that in the most ancient times the bodies of the dead were exposed to the air by being thrown on the fields without any covering. Thereupon there appeared a legislator who ordered people to expose their dead to the wind. In consequence they constructed roofed buildings with walls of rails, through which the wind blew, passing over the dead, as something similar is the case in the grave-towers of the Zoroastrians. Lastly, Narayana prescribed to them to hand the dead over to the fire. He also informs that Slovians, too, burn their dead, whilst the ancient Greeks seem to have had both customs, that of burning and that of burying. Among the Hindus, burning oneself is forbidden, especially to Brahmanas and Kshatriyas by a special law. Therefore these, if they want to kill themselves, do so at the time of an eclipse. Sometimes, they hire somebody to drown them in the Ganges, keeping them under water till they are dead. At Prayaga, they commit suicide by climbing up the *vata* tree and throwing themselves into the Ganges.

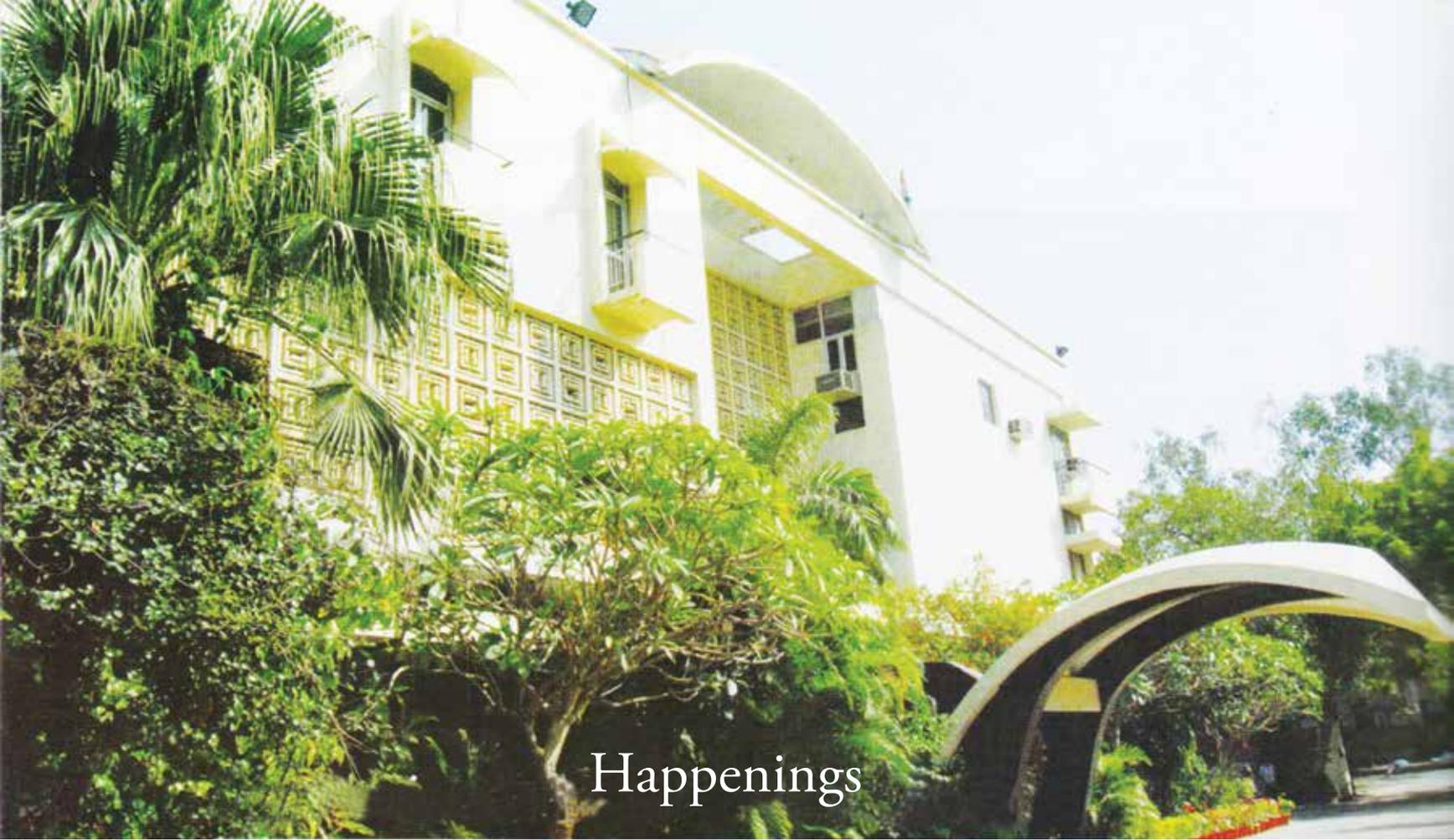
Al-Biruni gives an interesting account of Hindu festivities too. He makes a mention of various festivals about which other sources don't provide information. He also applies his logic in explaining reasons for various festivities. One important festival of Kashmir of which he makes mention is *Agdus*, celebrated on the 2nd Caitra on account of victory of their king, Muttai, over the Turks. On the 11th Caitra, a festival named *Hindoli-caitra* is celebrated in which the Hindus meet in the *devagriha* of Vasudeva, and swing his image to and fro. This festival is still a popular festival among the Hindus but celebrated in some other month. It is also important to note that such activities related with the cult of Vasudeva are considered to be of quite late origin by the scholars. They associate them with the arrival of *bhakti* through Caitanya and Vallabha, but Al-Biruni's account

pushes back their antiquity and popularity over a wider region. He mentions the day of Caitra purnima (full moon) as *Bahand*, a festival for the women. The 22nd Caitra is *Caitra-cashati* festival, a day of merriment holy to Bhagavati. The 3rd of Vaisakha is a festival *Gauri-tritiya*, holy to Gauri and popular among the women. The 10th Vaisakha is a day related with Brahmanas who are invited by the kings to perform sacrifices in honour of the Vedas. On the 1st Jyaishta is celebrated a festival when the Hindus throw the first-fruits of all the seeds into the water in order to gain thereby a favourable prognostic. The Jyeshtha Purnima is a festival for women, named *rupa-pancha*. The whole month of Ashadha is devoted to alms-giving. During this time the household is provided with new vessels. On the full moon day of Sravana, Hindus give banquets to the Brahmanas. On the 8th Asvayuja, begins the sucking of the sugarcane and this festival is holy to Mahanavami. On the 15th Asvayuja is the festival Puhai in which Hindus wrangle with each other remembering the wrangling of Vasudeva when asked by Kamsa to fight. On the 23rd Asvayuja is the festival Asoka, also called Ahoi. In the month of Bhadrapada, the Hindus celebrate *pritripaksha* for a period of 15 days. On the 3rd Bhadrapada is the festival Harbali, for the women. It is their custom that a number of days before they sow all kinds of seeds in baskets, and they bring the baskets forward on this day after they have commenced growing. They throw roses and perfumes on them and play with each other during the whole night. On the following morning they bring them to the ponds, wash them, wash themselves, and give alms. On the 6th Bhadrapada, the day is called Gaihat when people give food to those who are in prison. On the 8th Bhadrapada is the festival *dhruvagriha* which is related with the well being of children. The festive day of Bhadrapada Ekadasi is called *Parvati* which is a much venerated festival related with the cult of Vasudeva. From 16th Bhadrapada, the Hindus celebrate a festival *karara* for seven

days. When the moon stands in her fourth station, Rohini, they call this time *Gunalahid*, celebrating a festival for three days over the birth of Vasudeva (*Srikrishna Janmashtmi*). On the 26th and 27th Bhadrapada (or in Vaisakha), Kashmiris celebrate a festival related to pieces of a wood 'gana' and Vitasta (Jhelum river) flowing through the capital city of Adhishthana as associated with Mahadeva. In the Swat region, there is a valley in which fifty-three streams unite. It is called Tranjai and in those two days, the water of this valley becomes white, in consequence of Mahadeva's washing in it, as people believe. On the 1st Karttika is the festival *Dibali* which is also called Balirajya as on the night of this festival Lakshmi is believed to liberate Bali who is a prisoner in the seventh earth, once a year. He also informs that in the night the Hindus light a great number of lamps. This account of Al-Biruni confirms the antiquity of *Dipavali* festival as the festival of lights and that Al-Biruni got this information from someone belonging to the southern part of India since Balirajya is a concept popular in Kerela. Al-Biruni further informs that the 3rd Margasirsha is the festival *Guvana-batrij* which is dedicated to Gauri. The 8th Pausha is Ashtaka day when Brahmanas are presented with dishes prepared from a plant *Atriplex hortensis*. On the 8th Pausha (Krishna), the day is called *Sakartam* and turnips are eaten. The 3rd Magha is called *Mahatrij* and is a festival sacred to Gauri. The 15th Magha is called *Camaha* and on this day Hindus light lamps on all high places. The 23rd Magha is *Mansartaku* or *Mahatan*, the day on

which Hindus receive guests and feed them on meat and large black peas. The 8th Phalguna is *Purartaku*. The *Phalguna Purnima* is festival *Odaa* or *Dhola* when the Hindus make fire on places lower than those on which they make it on the festival *Camaha*, and they throw the fire out of the village. The next day, i.e. 16th Phalguna is *Sivaratri* when Mahadeva is worshipped during the whole night. The Hindus of Multan celebrate a festival *Sambapurayatra* which is dedicated to the Sun.

The account given by Al-Biruni is a rich source of information on medieval Hindu India. Many of the information given are such as are not found from any other source. The information is of course sometimes not reliable for some of its contents but is valuable as it still gives an idea of the times. For one fact, Al-Biruni must be appreciated and that is in spite of his prejudices, he did not comment adversely on the religious beliefs of the Hindus even when the chronological framework provided for certain incidents, like the dyke of Rama, is beyond one's comprehension. A major part of his writings is related with astronomy and various calculations like that of the radius of the earth, distances of poles, longitudes of places, number of rotation of planets, etc. His knowledge of world civilizations, their philosophy and sciences and combining them with the studies of Indian sciences and mathematics makes his contribution really unique. From a historical perspective too, his account is precious and helps in solving various problems of history.



Happenings



**An international symposium showcasing the
Rishi-Sufi traditions of Kashmir**

Organised by Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Jashn-e-Bahar Trust,
New Delhi at Srinagar

Hami ast

*Kabhi na Masjid-o-mandir meiN imtiyaaz karooN
ButoN ki kar ke parastish adaa namaaz karooN
Tawaaf-e-kaaba ko jaaooN rah-e-Benaras se
Khuda se milne ki khaatir butoN se saaz karooN*

- Abdul Kuddoos Rasaa Javidani
(Hailed as Kashmir's Shayar-e-Fitrat)



DG, ICCR with Ho'ble Shri Fahrukh Abdula

(Never will I differentiate between a temple or a mosque
I will pray to idols and offer namaaz
I will go via Benaras to circum-ambulate the Kaabaa
To meet Khuda, I will associate with idols)

*Hami Ast — It's Here
Where Vedanta & Sufism merge*

Gar firdaus bar roo'e zami'ast; Hami'ast-o-hami'ast-o-hami'ast

*If there is paradise on the face of earth, it's here,
it's here, it's here*

A Concept Note for an international symposium showcasing the Rishi-Sufi traditions of Kashmir

With a special emphasis on their syncretic connect, their common base in the hoary Hindu & Islamic traditions an Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) & Jashn-e-Bahar Trust Presentation

The Context – Why this symposium

It's here...

...in Kashmir, also known as Rishi Vaer or Pir Vaer, the valley of rishis and pirs, that...

Vedanta & Tasawwuf came together to create a unique Sufiana tradition like that of the 'Rishis' who could be both Hindu or Muslim;

The blessed Himalayas nurtured Hindu saints, Buddhist bhikkhus as well as the sufi masters

who had travelled here from Central Asia, Persia and Turkey and the likes of Lal Ded and Nand Rishi.

Shiva dominates the hills of Srinagar at Shankaracharya; the Dal Lake resonates to the Sufiana kalaam at Hazrat Bal

And, in the present troubled times when the people of the Valley are passing through untold hardships, the only solace comes from these glorious philosophic and spiritual traditions enriched by our saints and sufis.

The history of India has for its landmarks not wars and emperors but saints and scripture.

- Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

The Concept

The Sufi philosophy is universal in nature. It's a belief system beyond borders. It's a way of life that sublimates the differences of creed and faith, nation and tribe. And the verdant Kashmir valley has been a melting pot of several religious-spiritual traditions for millennia.

The serenity of the Himalayas inspired the Hindu 'Rishis' and nourished the Buddhist Bhikkhus. And when the first Sufis, led by Bulbul Shah of Turkistan, made their way here in the 14th century, they triggered an intermixing of influences that culminated in unique composite traditions that were fostered at the Sufi dargahs, that dot the valley. Ethnicity, creed or race makes no difference at these uniquely syncretic centres of spiritual growth in Kashmir.



In the Vedic period, Rishis were world-renouncing hermits who retired to caves in forests and mountains to meditate and subject themselves to stern austerities. In the later Buddhist era, Rishis took the form of bhikkhus, who lived a simple life. The founder of the Muslim Rishi movement in Kashmir, Nuruddin Nurani (1377-1440), built on the pre-existing Rishi tradition and transformed it into a vehicle for the spread of Islam.

Nuruddin Nurani became known as Nund Rishi and as Sahazanand ('the blissful one') among his Hindu followers. The breadth of his vision can be appreciated from the fact that he accepted as his first spiritual preceptor the Shaivite female mystic, Lalleshwari, (1320–1392) fondly remembered by the Muslims as Lalla Mauj ('Mother Lalla') or Lalla Arifa ('Lalla, the Realised One') and as Lal Ded. She insisted that Hindus and Muslims must realize their common humanity, being creatures of the same God. Thus, she says:

*Shiv chhuy thali thali rozan
Mo zaan hyund ta musalman
Truk ay chhauk tapan panun parzanav
Soi chhay sahib as sati zani zan*

— Lal Ded

(Shiva is all-pervading and present in each particle
Never differentiate between a Hindu and a Muslim
If you are wise and intelligent, know thy self
There lies acquaintance with God)

The sayings of Lalla Arifa echo in the valley to this day. She sang in the language of the masses and created the mystic poetry called vatsun or Vakhs, literally "speech." Known as Lal Vakhs, her verses are the earliest compositions in the Kashmiri language and are an important part of the history of Kashmiri literature.

In the last millennium, Kashmir, as also the rest of India, has produced a galaxy of great saints, seers and savants who have enriched, elevated and refined life and helped the people at large. Kashmir's pantheon of great sufis and saints that started with the likes of Bulbul Shah, Hamdani, Lalleshwari, Rupa Bhawani, Sheikh Nuruddin,

Parmanand, Rishipir, belong to all times and to all nations. They transcend the bonds of communities and conventions, place and time.

Today Sufis span several continents and cultures with followers all over the world. India and specially Kashmir, is and has been a cornerstone in the flowering of the Sufi way of life. Across the sub-continent, literature, music, dance, calligraphy, architecture, culture, costume and language itself - all bear the footprint of the Sufis.

And, in the strife riddled 'Paradise on Earth' that is Kashmir, the Sufi sect still keeps alive some fascinating traditions. eg., in Kashmir, many Muslim devout and sufis have the habit of reciting endless 'mantras' based on the Holy Suras, entering a state of semi-trance that, they say, helps the communion with Allah. In Kashmir, where the population pays the high price of a long drawn crisis, this mystical practice, derived from the Hindu mantra recitation, seems to be an effective way to heal the spirit.

The two-and-a-half day symposium creates an international platform to discuss the contemporariness of the Rishi-Sufi tradition of Kashmir and a special focus on its contributions.

The Aim

Through 'Hami Ast' we come together to explore the Rishi-Sufi tradition and its composite roots; its relevance and ways to strengthen it as a bedrock of India's and Kashmir's peaceful, progressive future.

We wish to touch on, revive and rejuvenate this common cultural cord that has always been the most effective weapon to defeat divisive forces, especially in Kashmir.

Through a focus on the glorious tradition of 'Kaumi Yakjahti' (brotherhood) that has fostered a culturally rich, symbiotic tradition it has imbibed the best from all cultures and peoples and grew beyond narrow religious boundaries.

That has always united the people of the valley and inspired others into calling it a paradise of earth.

After all, it's not just geographies that make the repute of a place, but it's the spiritual and social ideals that it stands for, that attract all.

Kashmir, with its hoary and assimilative traditions is special and unique. We celebrate this uniqueness through bringing the spotlight back on the inimitable Kashmiri Rishi-Sufi footprints on the literature, arts, performing arts, spirituality and daily life of the beautiful valley of Kashmir, the pride of India.

The Event

The two-and-a-half-day international event, organised in Srinagar, celebrates and creates a spotlight on the syncretic traditions of Kashmir. It includes both serious discussions on the subject and its relevance today as well as a scintillating cultural extravaganza.

The Participants

The participants will include experts on Sufi thought from Kashmir, the rest of India, and neighbouring countries which have been a part of this circle of influence.

Besides Sufi thinkers, practitioners, philosophers, we will also invite proponents of allied fields that include academics, historians, calligraphers, litterateurs, singers, performers etc.

From

A wide span of countries like – Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt and of course from across India and Jammu & Kashmir.

For example, from Turkey, we could invite:

Dr. Nuri Simsekler (He is a professor of Perisan Language in Konya (Qonia) Seljuk University and



also is the director of Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi Research Center.) & Esin Bayru and her group of Whirling Derwishes. She is granddaughter (22nd generation) of Maulana Jalal ud-Din Rumi.

The Structure

The first two days comprise three discussion sessions each followed by a Sufi cultural evening. The opening session on day-1 is the inaugural. And the final day (day three) is the culminative, social gathering.

In all, the national and international participants discuss five pertinent themes in seminars and present pre-selected papers. The sessions are open to audience and the media who get a 5-10 minute question-answer break after every paper. This makes the sessions interactive. Multi-media facilities that add charm to the presentations. Each session is coordinated by an expert (Indian or International).

The cultural evenings are open to the public.

Day-3 starts with a keynote address and culminates into an informal final session, more like a celebration, complete with cultural performances.

The Themes

The topics for the sessions could be along the following lines:

1. Kashmir & its syncretic traditions in the context of the Rishi-Sufi tradition and its impacts over a millennium; Indian & international Sufi panorama today & the role of Kashmir
2. Sufism – part of life – literature, films, media, arts, crafts, music, food, culture, architecture...
3. Changing trends in Sufi culture with time and place, different sects & disciplines (national & international)
4. Women Sufis; women and Sufism, especially in Kashmir

5. Being a Sufi in modern times; the Sufi paradigm & its relevance; Does the world need Sufism today & why; How do we preserve and promote Sufism & its values

The Venue

A conclave centre on the banks of the Dal Lake in Srinagar or impactful venues like the Kashmir University etc).

It will also host an international Sufi Calligraphy exhibition. We can use the auditoria as well as open spaces Dal for our purpose.

The Time

The ideal time for hosting the summit, in this context, will be August/September.

The Cultural Extravaganza

The cultural evenings, or Mehfil which we can call 'Samaa' after the Sufi tradition, during the evening on the first two days will include performances from Indian and international groups as well as local folk artists, Sufi singers and even Sufi rock bands etc on day one and a Santoor recital and a mushaira with participants from Jammu and Kashmir, India and abroad, on the second day.

Qawwali, Kafi, Ghazal, The Dancing Dervishes, Sufi Bands (We could choose from these) representing a kaleidoscope of languages, nationalities and culture, come together for these extravaganzas.

Day-3, which culminates into an informal final session, more like a celebration, will also have cultural performances.

Plus... A book comprising all the papers presented during the symposium, is part of the offerings.

Audio-visual coverage can be converted into a television series on the subject.

Social media and a website for the symposium comes into being several weeks before, to create awareness.

National & International Media is roped in full force as well.

International Conference on Classical Indology October 28-29, 2015

Organised by : Russian State University for the Humanities (RSUH) in cooperation with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, represented by the Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre, Moscow

Objectives:

The Conference will provide a valuable opportunity for scholars and professionals of different countries to exchange their views and share their experiences and research results in the field of Classical Indology.

In addition the conference through intensive and in depth discussions will achieve the following:

- Fruitful discussion on the relevance of the study of Classical Indology in Russia that will help in understanding the academic issues in both the nations;
- Discussions and decisions on suitable measures to be taken for the study of vast and significant Sanskrit literature in order to create intellectual unity at the bilateral level;
- Finding ways and means for the utilization of ancient Indian wisdom stored in Russian academic world
- Paving way for further research on ancient literature and commonality in both countries
- Restoring and reaffirming India's position as an intellectual partner and thereby reminding the rest of the world about its glorious past and rich cultural heritage depicted in Russian writings.
- Promoting friendly ties between the two nations on the basis of comparative and comprehensive understanding of the cultures, traditions and values upheld by their respective peoples. This will also result in the establishment of a peaceful world order.

Background Note:

Friendly relations between India and Russia go back to the hoary past. However, in recorded

history the close relationship is traced to the days of the Silk Trade Route and this long relationship has had an effect on the lives, culture and traditions of people in both countries. Russian folklore, fables and myths refer to India as a land of plenty inhabited by wise, talented, generous, cultured and learned people. With these Indian connections, the Russians realised much before anyone in Europe that the key to understanding the Indian worldview was through the study of classical Indic Studies in the original Sanskrit language.

In Russia, Indological studies had modest beginnings with the establishment of the Academy of Sciences at St. Petersburg in 1725. Theophilus Siegfried Bayer (1694-1738), a German working in the Academy was able to get a Brahmin scholar to St. Petersburg to teach him Sanskrit. Thereafter, Sanskrit teaching was carried out in an organised way but was carried out mainly by individual scholars in Russia. However, from the beginning of the 19th century, Russia had developed a rich tradition of Indological studies. One of the pioneers of the study of the ancient Indian language was Gerasim Lebedev who had spent significant time in India in the 1780s.

Sanskrit scholarship in Russia got further strengthened with Count Sergey Uvarov, an influential statesman and educational curator. In 1818, Uvarov inaugurated the Asiatic Academy of St. Petersburg, where Sanskrit was taught for the first time with Russian as the language of instruction. Tsarist Russian initially relied on foreign professors to teach Sanskrit, with German academics being the first to teach this ancient Indian language.-

Robert H. Stacy's *India in Russian Literature* mentions Pavel Yakovlevich Petrov, a Sanskrit scholar who had a particular fondness for Kashmir and had translated the Hindu epic Ramayana into

Russian. Petrov learned Sanskrit in St Petersburg and taught the language in the mid-19th century in Kazan and later in Moscow. He also translated Kalhana's *Rajrangini* (The River of Kings), a chronicle of the rulers of north-west India into Russian.

St. Petersburg in the second part of the 19th century even became one of the major research centres for Sanskrit and attracted Indologists from all over Europe. Rudolf von Roth and Otto von Bohtlingk, two German scholars, lived in the city and compiled a seven-volume Sanskrit-German dictionary called *Sanskrit Worterbuch* that was widely used in the academic circles of Germany. Von Bohtlingk had learnt Sanskrit at the St. Petersburg State University. He is also well-known for translating and editing *Ashtadhyayi*, the classical Sanskrit Grammar of Panini.

The most famous Sanskrit professor from Russia in the 19th century was Ivan Minayev, who also taught comparative grammar of Indo-European languages. He travelled to India and Ceylon in 1874-75 and wrote extensively about these countries.

The State Library of St. Petersburg has preserved the Sanskrit and Pali manuscripts that Minayev had collected in India and these can now be seen in the museum of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. Minayev's trips to India resulted in interesting ethnographic collections which are preserved in the N.N. Miklukho-Maklay Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography.

Yet another St. Petersburg-based Indologist, who made a great contribution to Sanskrit and Indian studies before the Bolshevik Revolution, was Fyodor Stcherbatskoy who was the best known authority on Buddhist texts. Stcherbatskoy was a student of Minayev and had worked on a theory of Indian poetry and had published the 'Theory of Knowledge and Logic in the Doctrines of Later Buddhism' in Russian in two editions. He later taught Sanskrit till his death in 1942. Stecherbatsky's scholarship of Hindu philosophy

and Buddhism won him the admiration of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. His pioneering work is on Buddhist Logic, which is considered to be an essential source book on the subject even today.

The interest and passion for Indic Studies, Sanskrit and Indian philosophy generated by Russian Indologists spread across various areas of Russian cultural life. Konstantin Stanislavsky incorporated several yogic exercises and psychological techniques into his Stanislavsky System for developing attention and concentration, and also for achieving 'Solitude in Public' on stage.

In the Post-Second World War phase a new generation of scholars began to pursue Indology, and India's warm relations with the USSR gave these scholars access to many old texts and places in India. The newer generation of Indologists still followed the path that was laid out by the great scholars of the 18th and 19th centuries in St. Petersburg.

The suggestion for holding the Conference came from Hon'ble Dr. Pranab Mukherjee, the President of India, during his visit to Russia at the invitation of Russia's President Vladimir Putin in May, 2015. President Mukherjee met a group of Russian indologists on the 10th of May, 2015.

The idea of the conference is supported by Efim Pivovarov, Rector, Prof. Alexander Bezborodov, Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs and by Dr Anna Matveeva, Rector Assistant for international affairs.

The Organizing Committee for the conference comprises of the following:

Efim Pivovarov, Rector of RSUH (co-chair);

H.E. P.S. Raghavan, Ambassador of India (co-chair); Mr Ashish Sharma, Director, JNCC; Mr Sanjay Jain, Deputy Director, JNCC; Dr Anna Matveeva, Rector Assistant for international affairs; Prof Sergei Serebryany, Director, E.M. Meletinsky

Institute for Advanced Studies; Dr Alexander Stolyarov, Director of the International Centre for South Asian studies; Prof Ramesh Bhardwaj, Head, Department of Sanskrit, University of Delhi; Dr Olga Pavlenko, Head of Department of Regional Studies and International relations, Institute for History and Archives; Dr Maxim Rusanov, Head of the Department of History and Philology of South and Central Asia, IOCA, RSUH; Dr Indira Gazieva, Deputy Director of the International Centre for South Asian Studies; Dr Anna Chelnokova, Associate Professor of Department of Indian studies of Saint Petersburg State University.

Prof Sergei Serebryany and Dr Alexander Stolyarov are the Program Coordinators from the Russian side while Prof Ramesh Bhardwaj is the Program Coordinator from the Indian side.

Panels proposed (and some Russian participants):

1. Classical Philology: Linguistics (Maxim Rusanov, Sergey Kullanda, Boris Zakhar'in, Anna Chelnokova, etc.)
2. Literature (Julia Alikhanova, Ludmila Khokhlova, Victorlya Vertogradova, Alexander Dubyansky, Sergei Serebryany, Gyuzel Strelkova, Irina Prokofyeva, Ludmila Vasilyeva, Yaroslav Vasilkov, etc.)
3. Story, archaeology, and epigraphy:(Leonid Alaev, Alexey Vigasin, Tigran Mkrtichev, Alexander Stolyarov, etc.)
4. Philosophy and Religion (Viktoriya Lysenko, Valeriy Androsov, Marietta Stepanyants, Nataliya Zheleznova, etc.)
5. Anthropology, Art, and Architecture: (Svetlana Ryzhakova, Elena Tyulina, etc.)

Languages of the Conference:

The working languages of the Conference shall be English (general) and Russian.

Format for papers:

Papers are invited on any topic relevant to the study of Classical Indology. The allotted time limit for the paper presenters is 30 minutes. Twenty minutes for the presentation followed by 10 minutes for discussion.

Abstracts should not exceed 500 words (excluding examples and/or references). Please indicate your source(s) and type(s) of data in the abstract (e.g. recordings, texts, conversational, narrative, etc.).

For co-authored papers, please indicate who is going to present the paper as well as who is going to attend. Abstracts should be submitted in the Word format.

Please send your abstract with the following information: (1) your name; (2) your affiliation; (3) the mailing address; (4) the phone number; (5) the email address; and (6) the title of your paper. The deadline for the receipt of the abstracts: September 25, 2015.

The organising committee shall be pleased to provide the accommodation to the participants at the University's Guest House: 6, Miuskaya square, Building 4.

For further information, please contact the conference coordinators:

Dr Alexander Stolyarov, Director, Centre for South Asian studies of the RSUH;

Dr Indira Gazieva, Deputy Director, the Centre for South Asian studies of the RSUH, International Centre for South Asian Studies, the Russian State University for the Humanities +7495-2506519 (office), Alexander Stolyarov: +79160592875; Indira Gazieva: +79166715462 (m) E-mail to: csas@rggu.ru

The Bhagavad Gita — Its Contemporary Relevance

Organized at Nehru Centre, London, from September 24 – 25, 2015

Mahatma Gandhi said, "The Bhagavad Gita is not an aphoristic work. It is a great religious poem. The deeper you dive into it, the richer the meanings you get. With every age, the important words in it will carry new and expanding meanings. The seeker is at liberty to extract from this treasure any meaning he likes."

This foreword was written by him in 1929 to his own Gujarati translation of the Bhagavad Gita from the Sanskrit, and later published in English in his periodical, *Young India*, under the title, "The Gospel of Selfless Action". To Mahatma Gandhi himself, the Gita was his 'spiritual dictionary'.

The Bhagavad Gita, The Celestial Song, is Lord Krishna's rendering for the benefit of Arjuna, his devotee and an invincible warrior. It is the crown jewel of the war epic, the Mahabharata. Its context is the battlefield of Kurukshetra, where

are assembled the armies of the Pandavas and the Kauravas, who are cousins but both claimants to the throne of Hastinapur. Arjuna finds his revered teachers, elders and relatives in the opposing legion of the Kauravas. Is the throne so important that his own people need to be killed for it? To him it is a paralysing conflict. Arjuna's moral struggle, even if not always its scale, is not unique. The actual battle to be fought by the two armies is just an outer conflict, one he can deal with. However, as it is for all of us, Arjuna's outer conflict is accompanied by a terrible inner one. It is for that which he seeks answers.

We live in a conflict-ridden world — at an individual, social, national and international level. Moral questions abound in a world where need, greed and uncontrolled ambition make us, individually or collectively, act in ways that demand the crushing of conscience. However, we



A view of the audience



Director, TNC, London, Shri Srinivas Gotru addressing the audience

find that we are eventually left to traverse a long and solitary road of pain. But, does the tutoring of a charioteer to a warrior in a distant, pre-historic battlefield many millennia ago have any relevance in this unforgiving material and virtual world that mankind has created for itself?

The Bhagavad Gita is Lord Krishna's response to Arjuna's series of questions. As we absorb the persuasive logic of the discourse and the compelling imagery of the exchange, we too begin to contextualize mortality and glimpse the existence of a larger reality. Along with Arjuna, we learn about who we are and how to navigate life's enigmatic and unpredictable journey. The Bhagavad Gita has been called a '*sangharshasastra*', a scripture of conflict. Embodying the essence of the Upanishads, it is the guide to discernment, an exhortation to do one's duty. Said to be the source of omniscient and eternal wisdom, just as it provided an ethical refuge to Arjuna, it could do likewise to every individual constantly tossed around in the heartless, de-sensitizing turmoil of daily existence.

Although the Bhagavad Gita exists as an independent sacred text, being situated within the Mahabharata, gives it a tangible perspective. The Bhagavad Gita sent forth its message from the battlefield. There could have been no better setting for getting answers pertaining to the battlefields we live in, within and without. Its narrative format provides a smoother vehicle to transport a multifaceted philosophy. Its dialogue has us seeking and finding solutions to our simpler doubts as well as to our imponderable ethical struggles. We have Lord Krishna acting as the guide leading us to our own nobility and higher consciousness — telling us that every Kurukshetra is a Dharmakshetra, every battlefield we find ourselves in is the field for testing our sense of duty and our adherence to righteousness. We begin to perceive what it means to be a spiritual warrior on the battlefield of life. In the Bhagavad Gita, it is Lord Krishna himself, who is talking to us. He is everyone's charioteer, the one holding the reins.

As with Arjuna, he is also our friend and companion, patient and illustrative in his explanations. Truly, we do have many questions

to ask, about duty, devotion and action, about knowledge and discrimination, about loss and gain, fear and courage, about attachment and renunciation, about illusion and reality, about life and death and immortality, about divinity. We want clarity and logic in the replies we receive, we seek conviction.

Herein perhaps lies the key as to why the Bhagavad Gita is considered the great culminating synthesis of Hindu spiritual traditions, developed in interaction with the complex weave of several metaphysical and religious thought processes, and with different schools of philosophy converging in the transcendentalism of the Upanishads. The Gita is said to reflect the coherence resulting from the incorporation of different strands such as dharma, bhakti, jnana, karma, and yoga.

In his "Thoughts on the Gita", the great teacher, Swami Vivekananda says that in this one verse, क्लैब्यं मास्म गमः पार्थ नैतत्त्वय्युपपद्यते। क्षुद्रं हृदय दौर्बल्यं त्यक्त्वोत्तिष्ठ परंतपः॥, is embedded the Gita's key message. "O son of Pritha. There is in the world neither sin nor misery, neither disease nor grief. If there is anything which can be called sin, it is 'fear'.

Know that any work which brings out the latent power in thee is virtue; and that which makes thy body and mind weak is, verily, sin. Shake off this weakness, this faintheartedness! This fear is unbecoming of thee."

Swami Vivekananda goes on to say that "The Bhagavad Gita is the essence of the philosophy of Vedanta. Curiously enough the scene is laid on the battlefield, where Lord Krishna teaches this philosophy to Arjuna. The doctrine of the Gita is intense activity, but in the midst of it, eternal calmness. This is the goal of the Vedanta. Inactivity, as we understand it in the sense of passivity, certainly cannot be the goal. Were it so, then the walls around us would be the most intelligent. Nor does inactivity become activity when it is combined with passion. Real activity is combined with eternal calmness, the calmness which cannot be ruffled, the balance of mind which is never disturbed. And we all know from experience that that is the best attitude for work."

This level of work exaltation, however, is not easily reached. Understandably, Lord Krishna



High Commissioner, Shri Ranjan Mathai felicitating the students

tells Arjuna, "Gahanakarmanogatih — Intricate is the way of action."

The Bhagavad Gita is indeed intricate and extraordinarily deep. Each of its verses can be analyzed and unraveled for days, but could also be imbibed in an instant of complete and intuitive understanding. It is also said that virtually any of its verses can awaken one to inner tranquility and enlightenment. Spiritual inspiration that can transform a life abounds in each of its eighteen chapters.

The Gita continues to metamorphose itself effortlessly from the universal to the personal and back to the universal. That is its greatness. Even one who gains from its purely individual insight is equally able to transmit the universality of its message. As Herman Hesse, the great German author, summed it up, "The marvel of the Bhagavad-Gita is its truly beautiful revelation of life's wisdom which enables philosophy to blossom into religion."

The elucidation and the response to mankind's moral crises, which is at the core of the Bhagavad-Gita, has inspired centuries of Indian philosophers from Adi Shankaracharya to Mahatma Gandhi, as well as Western thinkers such as Huxley, Schweitzer, Thoreau and Eliot.

In 1848, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the American philosopher said, "I owed a magnificent day to the Bhagavad Gita. It was the first of books. It was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us."

The conference aims to deal with the innumerable questions that exercise and confound all of us today like how does the Bhagavad Gita help us tap into our own unique transformational energy? What counsel does the Bhagavad Gita have for the ordinary mortal beset by the demands of these crowded, impatient times? And how does one uncover these truths in a pre-battle dialogue that is so distant to our own everyday milieu?

It has been said that, of the sacred texts of Hinduism, the Bhagavad Gita is the most widely read and a crucial one for the understanding of Eastern mysticism. Even in this, our twenty-first century, ever so often there emerges a new edition of the Gita, each impelled by yet a different inspiration, each a new melody of the Celestial Song. And these works come from scholars and seekers not just from India but from across the continents.





Students from Sanskrit @ St. James reciting Sanskrit mantras

The pages of the Bhagavad Gita have thus been illuminated by many through their individual enquiry and study, and they light up our own foray into its ancient verses. The commentaries vary from complex philosophical studies to outpourings of simple and ardent faith. Each delves into the primal, richly-layered wisdom contained in these seven hundred verses, and adds, even if marginally, to the overall understanding of this great teaching. The Bhagavad Gita is thus made more accessible, and the divide of time, context, culture and value-systems gets bridged, effectively translating it for the contemporary reader.

There is hence an incredible treasury of reflection and wisdom now available on the Bhagavad Gita, from philosophers and thinkers over the ages and across the world. This trove points us towards our own ultimate aspiration, drawing upon Lord Krishna's affectionate teaching to a confused Arjuna. The ICCR would like to get people together to delve into this treasury of enquiry, and help enrich it further.

We do have a viable starting point. In two simple quotes. The first from Mahatma Gandhi on this

incomparable scripture: "The Bhagavad Gita teaches us nothing but pure ethics."

The second from the Bhagavad Gita itself: "The offering of wisdom is better than any material offering, O Arjuna; for the goal of all work is spiritual wisdom."

Suggested themes

1. The Bhagwad Gita – The battlefield allegory of conflict
2. The Bhagwad Gita – The synthesis of Hindu spiritual discourse
3. Karma, Bhakti & Jnana – The paths of action, devotion and knowledge
4. East & West – Are there differing perceptions of Bhagwad Gita
5. Bhagwad Gita commentaries – Varying focus over the centuries
6. The Bhagwad Gita – Ethics and spirituality
7. The Bhagwad Gita – Its contemporary relevance
8. Dharma – the source and substratum of global sustainability

International Conference of Indologists 2015

November 21-23, 2015

Concept Note

Indology is the study of India from different perspectives, the perspectives of history, culture, religions, languages, ethnology, anthropology, literatures, philosophy, art in its various manifestations, music, dance, drama, paintings, sculptures, bas reliefs, architecture and sciences, natural and physical. It can broadly be divided into two : classical Indology, the study pertaining to ancient India including in its gamut the medieval one and the modern Indology , the study pertaining to contemporary India , its society, its culture, its thought-currents, its achievements in various fields, its aspirations and urges.

For classical Indology the evidence mostly rests on the vast number of ancient texts, archaeological remains, the coins, the inscriptions, the historical Kavyas, the royal proclamations and so on which the scholars visit and revisit to draw a holistic picture of India down the centuries that can serve as guide to modern Indology serving as a prelude to the evolution of the various social institutions of India.

India has been home to one of the most ancient civilizations of the world which has been enriched by countless sages and seers, thinkers and philosophers, grammarians and linguists, artists and architects, physicians and surgeons, mathematicians and astronomers, etymologists and lexicographers, scientists and geographers, the explorers, the poets, the play-wrights, the prose-writers, the singers and the rhapsodists. It was here that the first stirrings of the human minds were noticed about the origin of the world in the form of a query as to from where the Creation has come, it is here that unity in the midst of bewildering variety was perceived, the eternity of soul was waqs realized, the zero was discovered zero and the cosmic sound Om that permeates the entire universe was heard.

From Vedic Mathematics to the *Lilavati* of Bhaskaracarya is a long journey for the development of Mathematics with mathematicians like Brahmagupta with their theorems appearing in between. So is it a long journey for Ayurveda from the *Atharvaveda* to Caraka, Susruta, Bhela and a host of other exponents of the science of Ayurveda.



India gave to the world two of its greatest epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the latter of encyclopaedic proportions and the vast Puranic literature comprising eighteen Puranas and the same number of Upa-puranas with astounding variety of subject-matter, the myths, the parables, the episodes, the sub-episodes which provided themes to the vast array of poets and play-wrights, painters and sculptors, musicians and singers not only of India but also to those of the vast swathes of territory going by the name of Southeast Asia. The *Pancatantra* travelled around the globe. It was translated, adopted and adapted in many countries of the world, the eastern and the western. It was India which gave to the world the Sanskrit language which in the words of Sir William Jones 'is of a wonderful structure, more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin and the more exclusively refined than either.' According to Raja Ramana, the great scientist, it 'represents a culture.... The culture is so powerful and viable that it has remained alive and unbroken over a period of nearly 5000 years.' The language has a number of grammarians, ten of them mentioned by name by Panini together with schools of them referred to by him as eastern and northern, *pracam* and *udicam*. Panini, the super computer in human form gave Sanskrit a grammar just in 3996 sutras,

aphorisms which is nothing less than a feat. He was succeeded by Katyayana and Patanjali, the former making additions to his work and the other explaining and expounding it with all the three forming the trinity of grammar (*trimuni vyakaranam*). A host of other grammars appeared after Panini but none of them could touch the high benchmark set for it by Panini.

For grammatical philosophy the *Vakyapadiya* of Bhartrhari is the work of its kind in the entire range of Sanskrit grammatical literature.

Known for well over a 1000 years as Bhasa, the speech, Sanskrit was the vehicle of higher thought and culture in India giving rise to such outstanding poets and playwrights as Kalidasa whose play *Abhijnanasakuntala*, popularly called *Sakuntala Nataka*, had so excited Goethe, the author of the world famous play the *Faust*, the greatest master poet of Germany and one of the greatest poets of the world, to get ecstatic on going through it in William Jones's English translations of it and exclaim

'Wouldst thou the young year's blossoms and
the fruit and declined
And all by which the soul is charmed, and





enraptured feasted, fed
 Wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself in
 the same name combined
 I name thee O Sakuntala, and all at once he
 said.'

Just as *Sakuntala* of Kalidasa had enraptured Goethe and many more so had enraptured his *Meghaduta*, the Cloud Messenger' which led to the appearance of a whole corpus of such works where all sorts of birds, animals and other things, animate and inanimate were used to act as messengers with a variety of messages to be conveyed to all sorts of beings. A beautiful example of lyric poetry is his (Kalidasa's) *Rtusamhara* which led to the appearance of whole class of beautiful lyrics being composed thereafter. One of the finest of these was the *Gitagovinda* which is sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments in all melody in Odisha even now.

Among the prose-writers Bana described Sarasvati incarnate (*Vani Bano babhuva*) steals the palm with Subandhu with each syllable in his work carrying double meaning and Dandin with his three works known the world over (*trayo dandiprabandhas ca trisu lokesu visrutah*) closely following him, besides many others.

Kalidasa, the poet, is followed by Bharavi, Magha and Sriharsa and a whole galaxy of other poets just as he, the play-writer preceded by Bhasa is followed by Bhavabhuti, Sudraka, Visakhadatta, Sriharsa, Murari and others. With dramas there has to evolve the science of Dramaturgy to lay down the rules for them the most well-known exponent of which was Bharata with his all-comprehensive *Natya-sastra* which carried on it the exhaustive commentary the *Abhinava-bharati* by Abhinavagupta. With poetry there had to be the science of Poetics. There appeared a whole galaxy of rhetoricians with their own theories and explanations and the science of Prosody with Pingala's *Chandahsastra* at the top.

The seeds of philosophy that were noticeable in the Vedic period flowered into well-knit systems, six of these orthodox and three unorthodox with a vast number of texts going with them.

The earliest evidence of Indian art is furnished by the Indus Valley the best known sites of which are Harappa and Mahenjo Daro with remains of well-developed city civilization, with excellent civic planning with houses, markets and drainage systems.

From the period of the Indus Valley to the period of the Mauryas there are few noticeable

archaeological remains. In the Maryan period there appear Asoka's pillars with edicts on them both in Brahmi and Kharoshthi followed by Caityas and Stupas the more notable example of which is the Sanchi Stupa and the wall paintings at the rock-cut cave at Ajanta. Under the Kushanas developed the Gandhara and Mathura art. The exquisite figure of the various deities as also of the Buddha and the Jain Tirthankaras in magnificent temple are further manifestations of the creative spirit of India in art and architecture. So are the temples at Mahabalipuram, the quarried temple at Ellora and the Sun temple at Konark besides hundreds and hundreds of them dotting the Indian landscape.

India had well laid cities with lofty mansions with roads lining the trees and markets to which repaired traders and merchants with their ware from all parts of the world. There are texts like the *Samaranganasutradhara*, the *Manavasollasa* for laying cities and towns. Similarly there are texts like the *Upvanavinoda* for laying gardens. There were water channels for storing water both for drinking and irrigational purposes. There is inscriptional evidence of huge dams having been built.

The science of agriculture was very developed in ancient India as can be seen from texts like the *Krisisastra*, *Krisiparasara*, the *Brihatsamhita* etc. which deal with the selection of soil for planting seeds as also with plant diseases, their cure, rotation of crop, irrigation and so on. According to the information with the National Manuscript Mission (NMM) there are three million manuscripts in India which are documented with the possibility of many more still waiting to receive notice and documentation. There are important texts like the *Vrksayurveda*, each of

Parasara and Surapala dealing with the ecology, morphology, taxonomy, histology or anatomy and physiology of plants and the *Krisisamayanniraya* of an anonymous author dealing with the overall agricultural operations,

There is full-fledged literature on Polity and Statecraft with works like the *Arthashastra*, the *Canakayaniti*, the *Vidurniti*, the *Sukraniti* and so on and the vast corpus of legal literature, comprising a whole set of Smritis dealing with law and jurisprudence. There are texts on music like *Ragavibodha*.

A large number of scholars both from India and abroad have been devoting themselves to the study of the vast Indian wisdom enshrined in old texts or paintings, sculptures, numismatic and archaeological remains. Still there are corners which need to be illumined. For this it is necessary to revisit all that is available to us and it is precisely for this purpose that a Conference on Indology is being convened. Scholars participating in it are those who have devoted their life-time to the interpretation and reinterpretation of Indian knowledge system. Their effort would lead to putting the proper focus on areas that need better attention and further probe so that the contribution of India is better appreciated by the global community.

The Conference is divided in the following five sub-themes:

- (1) Indological Studies in Historical Perspective
- (2) Sanskrit Literature—Past and Present
- (3) Sanskrit Drama in Theory and Practice
- (4) Indian Philosophical Thought
- (5) Indian Art and Architecture

International Conference on 'Shared Heritage' as New Variable in the Indo-Korean Relations: Historicising the Legend of Princess from Ayodhya and its Legacy

Organized by ICCR in collaboration with India International Centre from, July 14-15, 2015 at IIC

The legend of the Princess from Ayodhya and its powerful legacy has created a sense of 'shared heritage' which in recent times has emerged as an important variable in the shaping of Indo-Korean relations. Indeed, India's relations with Korea date back to at least two thousand years. Religious and cultural contacts between India and the Korean Peninsula are significant for both countries. In the long list of these contacts, there are many things which have remained unknown but are being brought to light with the deepening of Indo-Korean relations. A Korean Buddhist monk Hyecho, an esoteric master, travelled to India in 723 AD and wrote a travelogue on the '*Pilgrimage to Five Kingdoms of India*'. India is regarded as the spiritual home by the Buddhists in Korea. In modern times, the Indian poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore wrote '*Lamp of the East*' in which he predicted the rise of Korea and its illuminating impact on the entire Asian civilization.

However, the most important historical contact has been the legend in Korea that indicates how the Princess Suriratna of Ayodhya is believed to have travelled to Korea for three months by sea, following a divine signal to marry King Kim Suro in 48 AD, which marked the beginning of the Garak Clan in Korea. Two thousand years have not been able to erase the memories of the existence of this happening but time has only helped in creating a large number of descendants from this royal marriage. Queen Heo Hwang-ok's descendants in Korea include the GimhaeKims, Huhs, and the Incheon area Lee clans. Among her famous descendents is Gen. Kim Yoo-shin, who first unified the Korean Kingdom in the 7th century. Contemporary personalities include former President and Nobel Laureate Kim Dae-jung and former Prime Minister Kim Jong-pil,

former President Kim Young-sam, and the wife of former President Lee Myung-bak (Mrs. Kim Yoon-ok).

Following the 'gotra norms', as followed in India, the family members of GimhaeKims and Huhs do not inter-marry as both are believed to be the descendants of King Kim Suro and Queen Heo. In South Korea itself some six million people (almost 10 percent of the total population) proudly trace their ancestry back to King Kim Suro and his Queen Heo Hwang-ok, the Princess from Ayodhya.

This legend of the Ayodhya Princess found mention in 'SamgukYusa' or 'The Heritage History of the Three Kingdoms', a treasured work in Korea, written in the 13th Century. There is a brief but clear reference that a princess from Ayodhya (Suriratna) came to Korea, married King Kim-Suro and became Queen Heo Hwang-ok in the year 48 AD. It is also said that the Huh family got the DNA testing done which proved their Indian and Korean lineage. The true descendents of the Kim and Huh families have for generations followed the advice of Queen Heo religiously and they continue to contribute five percent of their earnings to charity. It is still kept as a family secret and they shun publicity for such acts.

The legend of the Ayodhya Queen though has a deep rooted impact on Korean society and politics, but has attracted little attention among the academics and policy makers in both India and Korea. Both Indian and Korean scholars are still not aware of the significance of the Ayodhya Queen, the maiden name and family details of the Princess of Ayodhya or how she traveled to Korea in those times and so forth. However some

academic work on this issue has been done in Korea, such as by Prof. Kim Byung-mo on the “The Birth place of the Queen of King Suro of Karak” and even a television series was broadcast on the Korean TV channel MBC in 2010, titled “Kim Suro-The Iron King”. In India also there have been a few publications on this issue, such as a book by Ambassador N Parthasarathi titled, *Sri Ratna and Kim Suro: The Legend of an Indian Princess in Korea*. But there has not been any extensive academic work done on this issue in both India and Korea. Therefore, a conference, inviting scholars from both, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and India, deserves importance and urgency for multiple reasons. The ‘Past’ can work as prelude to the ‘future’ and has the enormous potential to galvanize bilateral cooperation between two Asian civilizations.

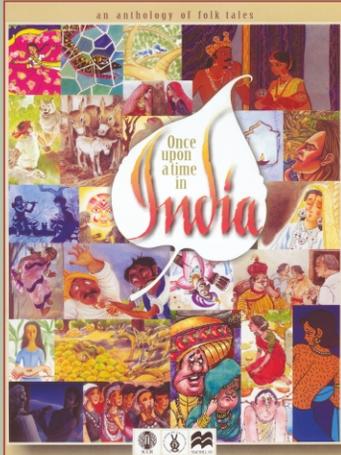
This conference emphasises on the cultural contacts between India and Korea in the backdrop of the legend of the Ayodhya Queen as well as examines the impact of this legend on Korean society. By linking a shared cultural past with the present, the conference intends to provide

a powerful cultural variable that can help in forging much closer partnerships between India and Korea.

Full-length research papers are invited on the following sub-topics:

1. The Legend of the Ayodhya Princess and its historicity
2. Impact of the legend of the Ayodhya Princess and its Legacy on Korean society and culture
3. The legend of the Ayodhya Princess and its role in the shaping of Korean political history
4. Idea of ‘Korean Homogeneity’ and the legend of the Ayodhya Princess
5. Prospects of the Legend of the Ayodhya Princess in promoting Indo-Korean relations
6. Economics of Shared Cultural Heritage: Ayodhya as a New Destination for the Korean Tourism Industry

The Ayodhya Princess and the Journey of Indian Social Norms, Values and Symbols to Korea.



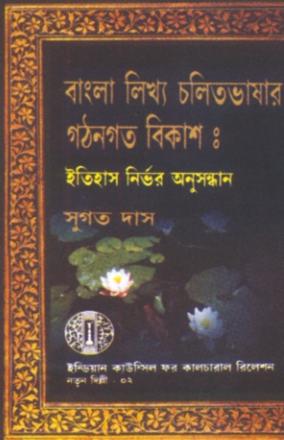
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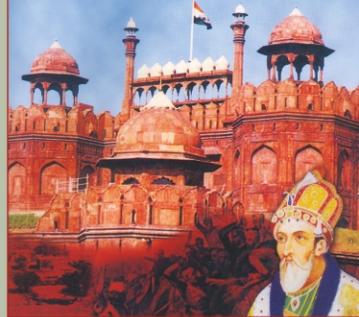
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VISION
OF
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1857 के 150 वर्ष पर विशेषांक



Islam
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THE IMPACT OF CIVILIZATIONS



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संपादक
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